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MAKING SENSE OF LEADERSHIP-IN-GOVERNMENT

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MAKING SENSE OF LEADERSHIP-IN-GOVERNMENT

Senior public servants' sensemaking pathways to leadership
in Westminster system governments – a study of New Zealand and Wales

by

MEGAN JANE MATHIAS

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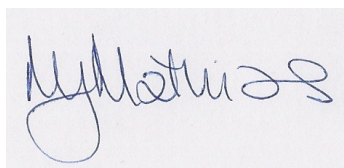
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Signed:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan Moizer', is written on a light-colored rectangular background.

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the phenomenon of leadership by senior public servants in Westminster system governments. Despite the important constitutional position held by senior public servants (SPS), we know relatively little about what they do day-to-day – in particular what their ‘leadership’ looks like, or how and why it occurs. To address this gap in knowledge, I use an inductive lens to study individual SPS leadership practices in response to strategic challenges they face, and the sensemaking pathways that lead them to engage in those practices.

My approach in this study draws upon a critical realist application of the Gioia Methodology, a systematic approach to the development of new concepts designed to bring qualitative rigour into the process and presentation of inductive research (Gioia, Corley, Kevin and Hamilton, 2013). I examine SPS leadership and sensemaking in two sites of Westminster system government – New Zealand and Wales – and draw upon qualitative interview data to forge narratives and a conceptual model to explain how SPS leadership is accomplished.

The findings reveal that SPS are not neutral, impartial bureaucrats, but are individuals whose identities and preferences shape their leadership on strategic challenges. Their preferences can align them to their minister’s agenda (agenda leadership), or lead them to try to alter an agenda, by engaging in practices to

reframe the challenge and/or proposed government response (steward leadership). The model maps two distinct sensemaking pathways underpinning agenda and steward –leadership respectively, revealing how key extrinsic and intrinsic factors combine to shape each. The model, and its component freshly-instantiated concepts, afford new empirical evidence to the debate on the appropriate role of SPS in Westminster system governments, which to date has been dominated by theoretical and normative contributions. Drawing upon this new evidence, I argue that both agenda leadership and steward leadership by SPS are demanded to supplement the bounded leadership of elected ministers; and recommend updating socialisation, scrutiny and accountability routines to recognise the reality of SPS as independent, human sensemakers and leaders in government.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This thesis reports on a study that adopts a sensemaking lens to explore the contemporary practice of leadership within Westminster system governments. It focuses on leadership by an influential yet under-researched set of actors at the heart of government, senior public servants (SPS). SPS hold a unique position in Westminster system governments, trusted to advise elected ministers in private and to manage resources and programmes in those ministers' names. They can wield significant power, but do so within a complex web of institutional conventions (Chapman 1984). Yet while there has been rich normative debate about the appropriate role and function of SPS (see for example Meier & O'Toole 2006, O'Toole 2006, Ferlie, Musselin & Andresani 2008, Du Gay 2009), there is a dearth of empirical research and indeed theory on what they do (Rhodes 2005).

The purpose of this opening chapter is to set the scene for what follows by introducing leadership by SPS as the phenomenon in focus, and acquaint readers with the broad traditions that underpin the research. This study arose from a desire to (begin to) understand a 'real world' phenomenon rather than to test or extend theory. Specifically, I want to cast fresh light on the nature of leadership by SPS as an important governmental response to strategic challenges. I therefore start by introducing senior public servants and outline the partial treatment of *SPS leadership* in the academic literature to date. I present the sensemaking perspective as a new tradition within organisation studies that holds potential to enable new empirical and theoretical light to be cast on SPS leadership, and I briefly outline the resulting design of my inductive

study. Importantly, a reflexive account of the origins of the work is also included in order to bring my 'idiosyncratic reasoning' to the surface, as the study's lead conceptualiser (Ketokivi & Mantere 2010). The structure of the thesis is then set out.

Senior public servants and leadership

Governments hold unique power in society to both support and regulate behaviour in the name of the collective good. They are responsible for deciding and enforcing laws, for setting taxes; they can legally imprison citizens, and commit a country to war. Governments can also support citizens through public spending and the provision of public services, such as health, education, social care, and by providing core infrastructure such as transport networks and utilities. Government budgets give an indication of just the *spending* influence governments hold: in 2016-17, the annual budgets of the New Zealand and Welsh governments – the two sites for this study - were NZ\$77.4 billion (£43.4 billion) and £15 billion respectively (English 2016, Welsh Government 2016).

SPS hold a privileged position in government. They are the top-ranking permanent, professional officials in Westminster system government administrations below elected ministers. They often serve longer terms in office than their political masters (Ribbins & Sherratt 2014) and are commonly attributed within substantial power, as monikers such as 'mandarin' (Du Gay 2009, Grube 2016), 'éminence grise' (Dunleavy & Rhodes 1990), and 'élite' (Chapman 1984, Carroll 1996, Pollitt & Bouckaert 2011) convey.

Given this privileged position, debate about the appropriate role and practices of SPS in Westminster model systems is longstanding, as I will discuss in Chapter 2. There is however consensus that SPS both advise elected ministers, and are charged with delivery of the government's agenda (Chapman & O'Toole 2010, Dillman 2007, Du Gay 2009, Hughes 2012, Rhodes 2014). SPS run large departments, take lead responsibility for major policy areas and budgets (such as, higher education; primary care; social services; environmental policy; business support), and manage the professional administration's relationship with ministers for those policy areas. Increasingly, they are expected to ensure the administrative arm of government acts as a unified corporate body too, joining up across departments to ensure government policy and processes are consistent (Jensen, Scott, Slocombe, Boyd & Cowey 2014, Cole & Stafford 2015, Van Wart & Hondeghem 2015).

To illustrate, Table 1.1 shows SPS tasks adapted from recent job descriptions for SPS in New Zealand and Wales. The list is no longer than those provided in a single job description, and illustrates the extensive responsibilities, and influence, SPS can hold. Owing to such responsibilities, and their position proximate to power, SPS are considered significant and influential actors in government (Chapman 1984, Hood 1990, Page 2001, Rhodes & Weller 2001, Eichbaum & Shaw 2008, Du Gay 2009, Hood 2010).

Table 1.1: Typical SPS leadership tasks

- Lead a large and complex department accountable for delivering the end to end process from policy to operational delivery
 - Work collectively across departments to ensure the government's priorities are delivered
 - Provide active leadership across the [policy] system
-

-
- Deliver high-quality policy advice
 - Maintain the regulatory environment and national policy settings
 - Work collectively with colleagues to implement changes to the policy system and link these changes with social and economic improvements more broadly
 - Be accountable for the public funds spent by the department
 - Provide vision, and advise on the future direction and shape of the department
 - Represent the government externally
 - Promote diversity and challenge out-dated ways of working
 - Enhance organisational culture to improve cohesion, agility and responsiveness
 - Nurture talent and deal with poor performance
 - Ensure compliance with corporate values and standards and the required standards of ethical conduct
 - Provide excellent leadership to take forward key initiatives
-

In recent years, as reflected in Table 1.1, SPS have faced increasing demands to show 'leadership'. Indeed, 'leadership' has become an established expectation for SPS in Westminster system governments, including in the two sites in this study, New Zealand and Wales. SPS are offered 'leadership development' and face appraisal using 'leadership criteria' (Horton 2007, Civil Service 2015, State Services Commission 2015). More generally, 'leadership' is a core element of contemporary public management discourse. The discourse and appetite for leadership in government today is however at the same time "mutable and ubiquitous" (O'Reilly & Reed 2012, p.969), positively valued, but open to wide interpretation (Chapman & O'Toole 2007).

A key argument underpinning the increased appetite for leadership in government is that today's environment is characterised by rapid, globalised change and dispersed power (Bryson, Crosby & Bloomberg 2015), and people turn to governments to resolve the complex challenges created (Bennis 2007),

which arise from the confluence of long term trends such as demographic shifts, technological innovation and globalisation. Such challenges are argued to test both the competences of those in government, and the values and norms of the societies they serve (Podger 2004), and as a result leadership rather than management or bureaucracy is the mode of behaviour public office holders should adopt. Leadership then is argued to be the appropriate individual pattern of practices expected from those holding public office, if their public organisations and societies are to respond effectively to contemporary strategic public challenges (Denis, Langley & Rouleau 2005, Brookes & Grint 2010, Getha-Taylor et al. 2011, Christensen, Lægreid & Rykkja 2013, Van Wart 2017). As t'Hart & Uhr (2008) put it, such public leadership “evolves as an adaptive response to the non-routine, strategic challenges in a society” (p.3). Moreover, as the scope and complexity of governing has grown, there is growing recognition that the leadership capacity of elected ministers is stretched, creating an appetite for more leadership than elected ministers alone can offer (Berman, Chen, Yang and Huang 2017).

Yet despite these increased expectations to perform leadership, and the élite status and influential positions that SPS hold, there has been relatively little empirical research conducted on their leadership:

“Little research has been undertaken into leadership in bureaucracies and there has been no significant work published on leadership in the British civil service. This is surprising. Senior civil servants occupy important positions in our society; they make important national decisions; some of them manage large organisations and are accountable for millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money” (Chapman 1984, p.182)

Chapman’s lament from 1984 remains substantially true (Rhodes 2005). A broader literature on leadership in bureaucracies is emerging (also known as administrative leadership, or leadership-in-government), with scholars offering

new conceptualisations of its characteristics, contexts, challenges, capabilities and consequences (Kellerman & Webster 2002, Broussine 2003, Pedersen & Hartley 2008, t'Hart & Uhr 2008, Dinh et al. 2014, Vogel & Masal 2015). This literature however typically addresses leadership by a broad swathe of appointed (unelected) administrators across all sectors and tiers of government, and is crafted to be relevant to most forms of democratic government system. To illustrate, Van Wart's oeuvre for example (Van Wart 2003, 2012, 2013, 2014) draws substantially but not exclusively on experiences in the United States; Hartley & Benington on the United Kingdom (Benington & Hartley 2009, Hartley & Benington 2010, Hartley 2012); and t'Hart on the Netherlands and Australia (t'Hart and Uhr 2008, t'Hart 2011, 2014).

Over thirty years after Chapman's (1984) observation, then, the more specific phenomenon of leadership by public servants in Westminster system governments, in the United Kingdom or elsewhere, has still received only limited empirical scrutiny. There are some excellent exceptions which offer tantalising insights into aspects of contemporary SPS leadership (Theakston 1999, Chapman & O'Toole 2010, Althaus & Wanna 2008, Grube 2012, Althaus 2013, Grube 2013, Hartley, Sørensen et al. 2013, Manzie & Hartley 2013, Alford, Hartley et al. 2016, Grube & Howard 2016 – which I examine in Chapter 3); overall however this is a sparse literature.

Many reasons can be speculated. SPS are undoubtedly an élite, and researchers may be daunted by the prospective challenges of access, building rapport and managing relationships (Hertz and Imber 1995, Moyser 2006). The work of government has also traditionally been done behind closed doors, though a far more open culture now permeates most Westminster system

governments today than when Chapman (1984) described government work as covered by a “veil of secrecy” (p.183). Nonetheless, key Westminster conventions persist which I suggest continue to discourage academics from focussing their research lens on public servants. By convention, most SPS still remain anonymous, and are perceived to be constitutionally indivisible from the elected ministers they serve (Richards & Smith 2016): such conventions encourage us to interpret SPS as conjoined in thought and deed with their ministers, impartially and professionally advising and delivering ministerial will – and they accordingly discourage examination of SPS themselves. These reasons may go some way to explaining the lack of literature on SPS leadership, but the gap itself remains.

Looking beyond leadership to the wider treatment of SPS in the public administration and political science literature, the appropriate role for SPS in Westminster system governments is hotly contested. The lens of this debate is constitutional, focussing chiefly on the relationship between the minister and her SPS, with the two embodying democratic and bureaucratic authority respectively. As a result, when scholars in this debate do touch upon SPS leadership, their standpoint is typically normative or deductive, rather than empirical. At its simplest, this debate pits concerns for government effectiveness against concerns for democratic integrity. Scholars emphasizing government effectiveness see SPS leadership as a key enabler (Denis et al. 2005, Horton 2007, Liddle 2010, Van Wart 2017); those prioritising democratic integrity place value on elected ministers retaining decision-making and accountability – and see SPS leadership as privileged agency which threatens such core constitutional norms (Chapman & O’Toole 2007, Du Gay 2009, O’Reilly & Reed 2011). The phenomenon of SPS leadership can only be fully

understood in light of this wider debate and its paradigmatic fault lines, and I examine it in detail in Chapter 2.

So, SPS constitute an influential élite in Westminster system governments who are today expected to perform leadership, but our collective knowledge about that leadership remains very limited. The central debate on the role of SPS reveals the important constitutional problem posed by the phenomenon of SPS leadership in Westminster system governments, but contributions are predominantly normative and/or theoretically deductive. Alongside Peters & Helms (2012), Ribbins & Sherratt (2013), Manzie & Hartley (2013) and Rhodes (2014), I therefore suggest there is a pressing need for more empirical evidence and analysis of what senior public servants do - and specifically their leadership - if we want to understand how contemporary governments function. Any endeavour to do so should however be clearly located in its intellectual context.

The traditions shaping this study

In this thesis, I adopt sensemaking, from the field of organisation studies, as a means to enable me to offer fresh insight and theory on a phenomenon that is traditionally addressed within the field of public administration (including overlaps into political science). My aim is for the study to be informed by, and to converse with, both literatures; however, my priority is to contribute into the public administration debate on SPS leadership in Westminster system governments, as the debate that dominates mainstream thinking on SPS. The discussion of SPS and leadership above introduced the outlines of the public administration debate, and so here I introduce sensemaking briefly. Both afford

brief foretastes of the detailed reviews of each tradition offered in the next chapters.

Sensemaking has become a central and vibrant tradition in organisation studies over the past thirty years (Allard-Poesi 2005, Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005, Hernes & Maitlis 2010, Brown 2015, Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015). Studying sensemaking as an enabler of other important organisational processes and outcomes is common in the organisation studies literature (Maitlis & Christianson 2014, Marshall 2016): a sensemaking lens has been used to elucidate processes ranging from strategic change (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991, Gioia & Thomas 1996, Balogun & Johnson 2005, Rouleau 2005), to crisis management (Weick 1988, Gephart Jr 2007, Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010, Weick 2010), organisational leadership (Pye 2005, Humphreys, Ucbasaran & Lockett 2012), and many others. As such, it is a proven tool for the examination of social processes, and appropriate for this study of the processes of SPS leadership.

Sensemaking draws our attention to processes of interpretation and action as constitutive of social realities, as well as to the influence of context upon those processes (Weick et al. 2005). It demands we view organisations not as static entities, but as always-emergent *organising*, comprised of processes of individual and collective meaning-making that are improvisational, shaped by local conditions, and constantly evolving over time (Jeong & Brower 2008, Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015). As such, adopting a sensemaking lens encourages a focus on people, on how they notice and frame events, and how they respond to them (Maitlis & Christianson 2014). In this view, how SPS interpret events

and react to them is important as a single sensemaking process, and as a process that also contributes to the ongoing construction of 'governing'.

The sensemaking perspective sits within the practice turn (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina & Von Savigny 2001, Whittington 2006, Nicolini 2009). Practice studies aims to "humanize management and organisation research by bringing the individual back in" (Jarzabkowski & Spee 2009, p.69). They encourage us to conceptualise phenomena such as leadership as performed by real people, which can only be understood with great attention paid to the cultural, temporal, social, political and environmental context in which they occur. Studies applying a practice-based view of sensemaking afford access to both conceptual and methodological tools to help a researcher grapple with the task of explaining how and why situated social phenomena - such as SPS leadership - occur (Weick 1995, Maitlis & Christianson 2014).

Despite this, neither sensemaking or practice studies have hitherto reached the mainstream of the public administration discipline. Some notable practice studies have been undertaken on public sector cases (Deem & Brehony 2005, Jarzabkowski & Fenton 2006, Whittington, Molloy, Mayer & Smith 2006, Vaara, Sorsa & Pälli 2010) and governing by network (Denis et al. 2007, Termeer 2009) but not always with full consideration of the particularity of the public context. Furthermore, few examples of sensemaking or practice studies can be found in the major public administration journals; the handful of studies by Boin & colleagues (Boin, t'Hart & McConnell 2009, Boin & Renaud 2013), and Abolafia & Baez (Baez & Abolafia 2002; Abolafia 2010) have seemingly not prompted wider scholarship on situated sensemaking in the peculiar context of government.

I thus suggest that adopting a sensemaking lens offers a twofold opportunity to contribute to knowledge. First and foremost, there is the opportunity to generate new insight into the under-researched phenomenon of SPS leadership; secondly, there is an additional opportunity, through reflection on this study as a case example, to consider the potential of the sensemaking perspective to broaden the public administration discipline. I therefore choose the resources offered by a practice-based view of sensemaking as affording conceptual and methodological tools suitable to this study. I now turn to the study's fundamental premise, its research questions and research design.

Research questions and design

In pursuit of my aim to explore and to begin to build theory about the phenomenon of SPS leadership drawing on the above traditions, I pose the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the sensemaking pathways that lead to individual SPS taking leadership in response to strategic public challenges?

A: Are patterns discernable across the steps of the pathway - noticing, framing and responding?

B: Which factors influence SPS sensemaking when taking leadership, and how?

RQ2: What, if any, are the constitutional or operational implications of these findings?

To answer my research questions, I adopt an inductive, qualitative strategy as appropriate to an exploratory study of the social, cultural, and political aspects of people and organizations (Myers 2013). Owing to the limited theoretical

conceptualisation of SPS leadership to date, which I explore in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 3, this study engages in the work of generating new theory about SPS leadership through in-depth examination of the complexity of their situated, human sensemaking. Setting aside questions of organisational management, I focus on leadership in relationship to strategic challenges as a core task for SPS today.

To support my aspiration of inductive theory-building, my research design draws upon the Gioia methodology, developed by leading scholars in the sensemaking field, Dennis Gioia and his colleagues (Gioia et al. 2013). The Gioia methodology expounds a systematic approach to inductive construct and model development, which explicitly aims to demonstrate rigour in data collection, analysis and reporting so that the resulting findings can better satisfy the positivist quality criteria for research - objectivity, reliability and validity. As such, the Gioia methodology is aligned to my critical realist stance, with both valuing and enabling examination of the interplay between phenomena in a stratified reality, as well as how those phenomena shape practices (Seidl & Whittington 2014). Chapter 5 offers a more detailed discussion of how I apply this methodology in practice.

I choose to examine SPS across two sites of Westminster government to help distinguish common processes and dynamics from those generated by unique local factors. The governments of New Zealand and Wales (which while politically devolved is still supported administratively by the unified British civil service) are selected as prominent sites of Westminster system government. I conduct semi-structured interviews with thirty-eight informants, exploring how they notice, frame and respond to strategic challenges (Maitlis & Christianson

2014). The study results in ideal-type narrative accounts of SPS leadership in Westminster system governments, and a process model that maps the individual sensemaking pathways that enable and enact SPS leadership. Theoretically, my findings contribute to a diversity of academic debates including administrative leadership, sensemaking, and the role of senior public servants. Practically, my findings attempt to highlight some of the key influences on individual SPS sensemaking, with significant constitutional and operational implications.

Origins of the study

Stepping back from the story of the thesis itself, it is also important to acknowledge the conditions that have made it possible, which I interpret as important to my sensemaking throughout the research process. I am the primary research instrument for this study, 'co-conceptualising' the findings in partnership with the input from all the study's informants, and steers from my supervisors. I am prompted towards reflexivity by my critical realist philosophical stance (Carter & New 2005, Fleetwood 2005) and by the sensemaking perspective (Weick 1999), as well as by leading qualitative research scholars in organisation studies and public administration (Alvesson 2003, Alvesson, Hardy & Harley 2008, Yanow 2009, Rhodes 2011).

For the first fifteen or so years of my career, I was a professional engaged in public service improvement and strategy development from multiple angles – as a management consultant, as a senior civil servant, and as a consulting researcher. My personal mission was, and remains, to improve how

government and public services operate. Entering the world of public management in 1997, my early career involved the translation of private sector management ideas and techniques into the public sector. Over time, I became dissatisfied with the insufficient regard paid to the unique institutional conditions of the public sector, and had a growing sense of how much people matter – not just those served ‘out there’, but the people *within* government too. I was inspired by scholars who focussed on the ‘micro’ experience of working in government and the impact of individuals on policy and outcomes – such as Lipsky’s (2010) seminal work on street-level bureaucrats, Rhodes & colleagues’ rich ethnographic examination of Whitehall¹ (Rhodes 2005, Rhodes 2007, Rhodes, Wanna & Weller 2008, Rhodes 2011), and Moore’s (1995) public value manifesto for public value managers. These works spoke to my own experience, and to what I could see around me from my vantage point inside (or consulting to) government: what politicians and public servants *do* in large part constitutes what government *is*. I was however frustrated by the relative scarcity of academic studies that I felt came close to considering public servants as individuals with agency whose practices constitute governing and policy (in combination with others).

At the same time, my career was evolving. While I had always tried to be a reflexive practitioner, in 2010 I co-founded an action research team that held an explicit aim of bridging the gap between practice and research in public management. This afforded the nudge needed for me to begin my own part-

¹ ‘Whitehall’ is a moniker for the civil service that evokes a street in London where key UK ministries are located.

time doctorate. Competing demands meant that I had to suspend my research after 18 months and, like many other mature students, it was only when I secured my first academic research post that it proved viable to make real progress on the PhD. This doctoral study was thus made possible via an emerging awareness of a significant gap in our collective knowledge about practices within governments, and a gradual shift in my career path towards academia. At this juncture, this study also feels like the early steps in a continuing path; in examining SPS leadership, I am contributing into the academic knowledge gap on practices in government, but the gap is wide and much more is still to be done. I pick up on this idea in my discussion of future research opportunities, and associated challenges, in Chapter 11.

[A note on conventions](#)

In this thesis I adopt some conventions in my writing that are helpful to acknowledge here. First, as readers may have already observed, I choose to write in the first person. My purpose in doing so is twofold: to be self-conscious methodologically, prompting myself into greater reflexivity (Webb 1992); and secondly, to render my role as ‘co-conceptualiser’ of this representation of a social world phenomenon transparent, in keeping with my epistemological position (Fleetwood 2005, Davies 2012). Like Rhodes (2011), my intention is to make readers aware of the “uneasy combination of involvement and detachment” that the study design demands (p.301).

Second, in the absence of a satisfactory gender-neutral pronoun in English, I opt to employ the feminine as the default personal pronoun. This stance

accords with my personal values, and more specifically helps, I hope, to chip away at the stereotype of SPS as older, white men in grey suits. Some are; many are not. Stereotypes, like conventions, encourage the persistence of lazy assumptions about the social world that can belie today's reality. Like Cameron (1992) quoted in Learmonth (2003):

"I have made a decision to use... 'positive language', in which all generics are feminine: she, her... I do not want my pronouns to slip by unnoticed: I want readers to think about it and to act on their conclusions" (Learmonth, 2003, p.24; emphasis in original).

Third, nomenclature for the actors in focus differs across the two sites in this study, so it is helpful to explain the terms used here. The devolved Welsh Government is supported by a cadre of the wider British civil service; as such top-ranking public servants there are called 'senior civil servants' - a formal designation for the top 3-4 tiers of civil servants that denotes their membership of the bureaucratic élite. The terms 'civil service' and 'senior civil servant' are however not universal across Westminster system governments, and hold distinct localised connotations. In the New Zealand Government's 29 national public service departments, the cadre of top administrators are variously labelled collectively, including as 'senior management' or 'senior leadership' (State Services Commission 2015). Instead of applying any label currently used, I invent 'senior public servant' as a new but resonant term for both of this study's research sites. It is used throughout the thesis to signify all those in the top tiers in permanent administrations across Westminster government systems. For me, stepping away from the nomenclature of the British system also generates a useful barrier that inhibits assumptions derived from my professional career slipping across unquestioned into this inductive study.

Structure of this thesis

The thesis proceeds in four stages: a review of the literature (Chapters 2, 3 and 4), methodology (Chapters 5 and 6), findings (Chapters 7, 8 and 9), discussion and conclusions (Chapters 10 and 11) each of which I outline below.

The literature review is presented in three steps. In Chapter 2, I set the scene for this study by locating SPS in their complex, layered interpretive context. I discuss the nature of their constitutional milieu, the Westminster system of government, as well as the three dominant normative role conceptualisations for SPS that are each rooted in a major public administration paradigm – administrator, manager and leader. I find that none of the competing paradigms fully dominates, with the result that all three role conceptualisations for SPS remain influential in both academic and practitioner discourses, which in turn generates interpretive space for SPS themselves.

In Chapter 3, I focus in on the literature on SPS leadership to date. I survey the relatively new public and administrative leadership perspectives which have emerged as context-sensitive developments in the leadership literature, before then reviewing the much smaller empirical and theoretical/normative literature on leadership and SPS in Westminster systems. I find there is an opportunity for empirical research to contribute into the predominantly normative debate on leadership as a legitimate role of SPS, by revealing how they make sense of leadership in practice.

In Chapter 4, I present sensemaking as a focus for this study, and as a theoretical perspective from which I draw conceptual resources to support my analysis. I review the literature on the sensemaking perspective and consider its

utility for this investigation of SPS leadership. I argue that a practice-based view of sensemaking affords a theoretical frame and an array of constructs valuable to the development of new empirical and theoretical insight into the phenomenon of SPS leadership. For this study, I place sensemaking as a socially-situated, individual cognitive process which both influences and constitutes leadership.

Having established the fit of a sensemaking stance for this study, in Chapters 5 and 6 I present my detailed methodology, research methods and background for the findings. In Chapter 5, I offer an overview of the critical realist philosophical stance for the study and connect the theoretical perspective of sensemaking to the epistemological and ontological assumptions of my empirical enquiry. I present 'The Gioia Methodology' (Gioia et al. 2013) as a set of research design principles that are both congruent with my research philosophy and established in the sensemaking perspective. I detail the overall research design, and offer a narrative account of the actual process followed. In Chapter 6, I set the scene for the findings by summarising the social, economic and political contexts in my two research sites, before reviewing the specific strategic challenges that formed the focus for informants' discussions of their sensemaking and leadership.

I present the study's findings in Chapters 7, 8 and 9. Chapters 7 and 8 present narrative accounts of the two modes of SPS sensemaking and leadership identified, Mode A and agenda leadership, and Mode B and steward leadership. I present these modes in the form of 'ideal type' narratives deliberately constructed to accentuate the typical phenomena and processes discovered. In each chapter I offer an interim discussion of the subset of findings, highlighting

the key concepts and patterns emerging. In Chapter 9, I develop an inductive process model with the potential to afford testable explanations. I define the study's key concepts, and then present my analysis of the dynamic relationships between these concepts, mapping the sensemaking pathways that connect them. In this way, I reveal key ways in which intrinsic and extrinsic factors combine to support two distinct sensemaking pathways and patterns of SPS leadership.

Chapters 10 and 11 contain the discussion and conclusion, respectively. In Chapter 10, I discuss the implications of the study's findings. I offer an integrative summary of the findings and then focus on the implications for the constitutionally-orientated debate on the role of SPS in Westminster systems of government. I argue that my findings show SPS not to be neutral, impartial bureaucrats, but instead as individuals whose identities and preferences shape their leadership on strategic challenges. I argue that their preferences can align them to their minister's agenda (agenda leadership), or lead them to try to shift an agenda, by engaging in practices to reframe the challenge and/or proposed response (steward leadership). I then discuss some of the significant constitutional and operational implications of these findings. In Chapter 11, I conclude the study by reviewing its contribution to knowledge, and its limitations; I offer a reflective and reflexive discussion of the research process, set out a future research agenda, and offer closing remarks.

This thesis thus follows a relatively traditional structure, in which key relevant literatures are reviewed first to set the theoretical scene, before conveying the study's findings, model and discussion. It is important to highlight however that the model and constituent concepts emerged from the research process,

inductively and then abductively as I circled between the literature and the data. The contents of the literature review were thus guided by the analysis, and while broadly scoped before the study, were written up *after* analysis had been completed (for an example of a similar approach see Nag & Gioia 2012).

Chapter summary

In this opening chapter, I have sought to set the scene for the rest of the thesis. First, I made the case that what SPS do, matters: they are highly influential in government owing to their unique, formal role which combines both advising ministers privately, and overseeing government organisations, policies and resources. I showed that while leadership is expected from SPS today, it is an under-researched and contested phenomenon in the academic literature. I then located the study in the public administration tradition, but drawing upon the assets of the sensemaking perspective as a new tradition within organisation studies to support the generation of new empirical and theoretical knowledge on SPS leadership. On this basis, I outlined the resulting research questions and design. Stepping back, I also offered a reflexive account of the origins of the work, which exposed to readers some of the wider context in which this study has taken place. Finally, I included a note on conventions and set out the structure of the thesis.

I now return to the beginning. Chapter 2 examines the literature on the context of the Westminster system of government, and the role of senior public servants (SPS); and Chapter 3 then assesses the extant knowledge on the specific phenomenon of SPS leadership.

Chapter 2 Senior public servants and the Westminster context

In this first chapter of my literature review, I examine the distinctive context within which SPS operate, the Westminster system of government, and the different ways in which the role of the SPS has been conceptualised. First, following Rhodes et al. (2009), Richards & Smith (2016) and others, I present the Westminster system as a web of mutable conventions that SPS must constantly interpret, and whose interpretation can both constrain or enable action. Second, I review the arc of academic debate on SPS roles. I discuss three dominant role conceptualisations for SPS, 'administrator', 'manager', and then 'leader', each rooted in a major public administration paradigm and its associated ideas and values. This chapter thus provides important background against which the more specific debate on SPS leadership is reviewed in Chapter 3.

Westminster system governments

SPS operate within the administrative arm of democratic parliamentary systems commonly described as Westminster system (or model/style) governments (Hood 1990; Dunleavy 1996). In day-to-day practice, the 'Westminster system' refers to a system of codified and uncoded constitutional rules that inform the running of the electoral system, the legislature, and the executive and administrative arms of government. Countries typically described as having Westminster systems are the United Kingdom, the originating source of the

system, and others shaped by British colonial rule including the Republic of Ireland, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Scholars however interpret 'Westminster' in quite different ways, emphasizing not only different combinations of rules, but also fundamentally distinct ontologies (Grube & Howard 2016). A key divergence lies between those who view the Westminster system objectively, and those who believe it is interpreted: Grube & Howard (2016) highlight Lijphart's (2012) seminal work, *Patterns of Democracy*, as offering an exemplar positivist view of the Westminster system, listing objective characteristics. Lijphart's (2012) analysis however centres on the character of the electoral system, and the balance of power across the legislature, executive and other bodies, rather than upon the character of the administrative arm of government. Those who see a permanent and impartial public service as a central tenet of Westminster systems question this omission (Rhodes et al. 2009, Aucoin 2012, Grube & Howard 2016).

Objectively-presented descriptions of public servants in Westminster system governments portray them as located within a permanent and increasingly professionalised administrative (civil / public service) departments, tasked to serve the government of the day (Shaw 2012, Waller 2014). Each department is headed by (an) elected minister(s); SPS, the top echelons of the public service, manage the relationship between ministers and their departments, and in particular are the ones who work with ministers (and their special advisers) directly. Constitutional legitimacy and democracy are considered to be maintained because ministers are individually accountable to parliament (Stanley n.d.). Indeed, "constitutional orthodoxy" holds that the relationship between SPS and ministers is straightforward; "civil servants advise, ministers

decide and the bureaucratic class is neutral, impartial and permanent”

(Richards & Smith 2016, p.499).

Yet leading scholars eschew objective descriptions of the Westminster system as inadequate. Instead, they view ‘Westminster’ as a set of stories, conventions, myths, or traditions which are widely held but also mutable, subject to interpretation (Hood 1990, Rhodes et al. 2009, Rhodes 2011, Richards & Smith 2016, Weller & Haddon 2016). Rhodes et al. (2008) suggest that practitioners inside government, including SPS, interpret what Westminster means for them every day; they “reach for historical notions of governance and call into play antecedent notions to enable them to better manage or understand their present-day circumstances” (p.462). Interpretation is crucial because the Westminster environment is saturated in artefacts, discourses and practices which all carry meanings:

“Office creates expectations. Rules provide direction. Precedents guide action. Civil services are the creation of decades. They consist both of organisational form and collections of individuals. They are suffused with formal institutions, long memories and established modes of behaviour. Yet they are also contested arenas. There are few certainties about how people should act in given circumstances. Civil servants must constantly interpret their position” (Rhodes et al. 2008, p.461).

The full array of stories, conventions and myths present in the Westminster system defies easy summary, and is analysed in rich detail elsewhere – see for example, Rhodes (2011). Nonetheless, three connected conventions are especially pertinent to this study as they relate directly to SPS: the ethos of office; the indivisibility of the political and administrative élite; and, being the guardian of the constitution.

The “ethos of office” (Du Gay 2002) combines political neutrality, independence (comprising objectivity and impartiality) and integrity as well as acceptance of

the obligations of confidentiality, security and anonymity (Meier & O'Toole 2006, Du Gay 2009). By embodying these ethical standards, SPS are afforded the privilege of advising ministers in private. As a convention, the ethos of office draws upon Weber's notions of bureaucratic office being a vocation, and taking pride in its obligations, as attributes of the persona of a good bureaucrat (Du Gay 2008, Byrkjeflot & Du Gay 2012). The ethos of office also has an important constitutional function, in that it demands a clear separation of the administration of government from the individual's private morality. Indeed, du Gay (2008) suggests this buffer between civic comportment and personal values is a crucial constitutional feature that enables governments to act consistently, and underpins core governmental values visible today such as equality, reliability and procedural fairness.

The second key Westminster system convention relevant to SPS is the indivisibility of the political and administrative élite. The key idea here is that the relationship between a minister and her SPS is symbiotic (Richards & Smith 2000, Richards & Smith 2016). Over time, the advisory privilege afforded to SPS extended to the delegation of ministerial discretion – that is to say of implementing in the minister's name, as well (Barberis 1998, Du Gay 2009). As such the SPS' relationship with her minister is unique, and hard to disentangle constitutionally. The public service collectively is considered to have “no constitutional personality or persona distinct from the government of the day” (Savoie 2006, p.261); the two are, by convention, constitutionally indivisible. The intended value of this convention is to create a private deliberative space in which a minister can be guided by her SPS' advice, and then to extend ministerial authority to SPS, who implement wide-ranging decisions in the minister's name. There is evidence that the convention of indivisibility of

minister and SPS has eroded in recent years, in examples of SPS being held to account by legislatures and in speaking publicly, separately from their ministers (Uhr 2014, Grube 2015); Grube (2012) for example, observes that some leading bureaucrats in Westminster systems have begun to advocate for their preferred policies in the media and on departmental websites. Overall however the convention of indivisibility of the political and administrative élite is considered still to hold significant sway (Richards & Smith 2016).

Third, the Westminster system places the civil service as a permanent and anonymous bureaucracy subordinate to government ministers but also, by virtue of their permanence and presumed independence, authorised to protect the country's "organically grown unwritten constitution" (Davis 2005, p.131), becoming a 'gyroscope of state', balancing and steadying the political system in the interests of good government (Hennessy 1989). The SPS is charged to ensure "stability, continuity and institutional memory... crucial to the realisation of responsible and effective governance" (du Gay 2009, p.380). The SPS thus has significant influence in the deployment of ministerial power - and also her own power and legitimacy, derived from this role as constitutional guardian. Conventionally, she balances the 'stressful ambiguity' (Rohr 1998) of serving political leaders while being seen to be impartial and professional, *and* protecting the integrity of the system through her ethos of office. The ethos of office, then, is the safeguard that ensures that an SPS, operating either in the minister's name or as constitutional guardian, does so with political neutrality, independence and integrity, and not informed by her personal values.

These interweaving Westminster conventions, understood here as socially transmitted myths or stories, are powerful. For example, in his ground-breaking

study of the internal workings of the core executive in the UK government, Rhodes (2005, 2011) finds that British civil servants *believe in* the Westminster model and its associated conventions – and their actions are directly shaped by these beliefs:

“For example, they stick fast to the Westminster model’s constitutional conventions. Ministerial responsibility may be a fiction in that ministers do not resign when their departments are at fault. But civil servants act as if ministerial responsibility is a brute fact of life (see also Marsh et al., 2001)” (Rhodes 2005, p.16).

Both New Zealand and the United Kingdom (including Wales) lack written constitutions (Aroney 2015), and it is reasonable to advance that dominant conventions may both command particular influence when they cannot be compared to a documented source, and may also be especially prone to evolution through subjective interpretation.

Rhodes et al. (2008) also propose that Westminster conventions are central to SPS claiming legitimacy. They observe that Permanent Secretaries (the top-most SPS in the British civil service) actively draw on these conventions to generate followership: “...for their message to carry conviction it must appeal to shared beliefs and practices” (p.473). So, Westminster conventions are powerful, but are also shown to be invoked in support of individual goals; through every articulation of a Westminster conventions, SPS also reconstitute them, reproducing or modifying them to achieve their aims.

At the same time as casting a potent influence on day-to-day practices in government (Rhodes 2005, 2011), the conventions of the Westminster system also generate significant interpretive space. Some scholars suggest that this equivocality of Westminster conventions is useful, generating an interpretive space that SPS can take advantage of (Weller & Haddon 2016) – for example,

“as a means of legitimising change and defending practices” (Rhodes et al. 2008, p.473). This assumes SPS are acting in pursuit of the public good. A critical slant on the same practice by contrast might highlight that Westminster myths can be invoked by system incumbents as a legitimizing mythology to reinforce their own elite positions (Stoker 1998, Richards & Smith 2000, Rhodes 2005, Richards 2008): space for interpretation also generates space for self-interest (a view reinforced by the parallel literature on public service bargains, blame avoidance and bureau shaping, which all interpret the Westminster system as a series of exchanges between self-interested actors (see for example, Schaffer 1973, Hood 2002, Hood & Lodge 2006, Lodge & Hood 2012, Bourgault & Van Dorpe 2013)).

In sum, while the Westminster system of government has been objectively described in terms of structural characteristics (Lijphart 2012), greater insight into how the Westminster system influences SPS can be derived by interpreting ‘Westminster’ as a collection of socially-conveyed conventions or ‘myths’ (Rhodes 2005, Rhodes 2011, Richards & Smith 2016). In the literature, three conventions are identified as speaking to the role and function of SPS - the ethos of office; the indivisibility of the political and administrative elite; and, being the guardian of the constitution. These conventions are innately equivocal, affording SPS significant discretion in their interpretation. None however places SPS as leaders. In the next section, then, I trace the debate on the role of SPS in Westminster system governments, which reveals how the role of leader, and the idea of leadership by SPS, has emerged.

The role of a senior public servant

In this section, I trace the rich and ongoing debate on the role of SPS in the context of Westminster system governments, highlighting the deep connections between key SPS role conceptualisations and the wider ideas and values of their parent paradigms. I suggest it is only possible to fully understand the debate on SPS as leaders, discussed in Chapter 3, in the light of the alternative visions promoted. The three key role conceptualisations debated are ‘administrator’, ‘manager’, and then ‘leader’.

Before proceeding, a brief note on terminology. Here, I examine externally-created role *conceptualisations*, which I define as relatively well-developed ideal-types, that are both descriptive and prescriptive - bundles of expectations that carry the heavy weight of social norms, and hopes. “Role conceptualizations formulate what we wish to *be*, not just *do*” (Stout 2012, emphasis in original, p.12). SPS’ role conceptualisations are inherently political, inevitably entangled with normative views on the ‘right’ model of government, of what is legitimate within democratic societies. How an individual internally and reflexively interprets her role, influenced by external role conceptualisations, can then be distinguished using the term *role conception* (Stout & Love 2013). Distinguishing between the external and internal exposes the interplay between the two to investigation. This chapter, as a literature review, contains my appraisal of the academic presentation and debate of SPS *role conceptualisations*; SPS’ internal role *conceptions* will form an important element of the study’s findings.

In reviewing the literature, I identify a core narrative on the role conceptualisations of public servants, aligned to the evolution of public administration paradigms since the mid-twentieth century (Crosby & Bryson 2005, Osborne 2010, Stout & Love 2013, Rhodes 2014). Three roles are typically presented in sequence: the senior public servant as an administrator, within a Traditional Public Administration (TPA) paradigm, which lasts until the late 1970s; then the public servant is conceptualised as a manager, reflecting the dominance of the paradigm of New Public Management (NPM) between the 1980s and 2000s; and since the mid 2000s, a number of competing conceptualisations of a post-NPM paradigm have been articulated. One with particular traction in the UK and New Zealand is New Public Governance (NPG), in which a role conceptualization of 'leader' has emerged for public servants (Osborne 2010). I summarise this sequence in Table 2.1 below, adapted from Rhodes (2014) and Osborne (2006), before discussing each paradigm and role conceptualisation in turn.

**Table 2.1: senior public servant role conceptualisations and key practices by public administration paradigm
(adapted from Rhodes 2014 and Osborne 2010)**

Paradigm						Senior public servant role		
	Emergence	Theoretical roots	Unit of analysis	Resource allocation mechanism	Core beliefs	Role conceptualisation	Key practices	Relationships emphasized
Public Administration	Late 19th century – early 20th century	Political science & public policy	The political-administrative system	Hierarchy	Ethos of office	Administrator	Ministerial advice & implementation	Minister, Crown
New Public Management	Late 1970s into 1980s	Rational choice theory & management studies	Intra-organisational management	Markets	Efficiency, competition & the market	Manager	Management of organisational resources & performance	Department, service delivery partners
New Public Governance	2000s	New institutionalism & network theory	Inter-organisational governance	Networks	Trust & reciprocity	Leader	Negotiation of values, meanings & relationships	Stakeholders beyond core department

The **administrator** role conceptualisation is rooted in the Traditional Public Administration paradigm. Traditional Public Administration refers to bureaucrats working in a hierarchy of authority and safeguarding the state tradition (Rhodes 2014). The Traditional Public Administration paradigm for countries that have a Westminster model (of which the UK and New Zealand are exemplars) draws on two inter-related sets of ideas: Weberian bureaucracy and the British constitutional bureaucracy. Weber's bureaucracy is an analytic construct typically simplified into three symbolic ideas (Weber 1978). First, a belief in a rational-legal political order; second the organisational setting of the bureau, defined by formality, hierarchy, and a clear division of functions reinforced by rules; third, the bureau as populated by full-time career administrators, benefiting from "organized careers, salaries, and pensions, appointed to office and rewarded on the basis of formal education, merit, and tenure" (Olsen 2006, p.2).

In the Traditional Public Administration paradigm, the administrator role is conceptualised in terms of some core Westminster conventions (or myths) (O'Toole 2006, Du Gay 2009, Chapman & O'Toole 2010). These focus on the public servant's position vis-à-vis other roles in the constitutional state, especially the elected minister, with each symbolising bureaucratic authority and democratic authority respectively. As discussed earlier in this chapter, three conventions are pivotal: the ethos of office; the indivisibility of political and administrative elite; and, being the guardian of the constitution. As Richards & Smith (2016) explain, from a TPA viewpoint, the driving purpose is to maintain a stable and resilient polity:

"The original WM [Westminster Model] of official/ministerial relations was a remarkably consistent governing mechanism. It was based on the notion of an indivisible state elite ruling in the national interest and accountable via Parliament to the electorate. Democracy was embedded in the system but not in a way that would compromise strong government. Officials would eliminate the noise of sectional and partisan interest to ensure policy in the national interest" (Richards & Smith, 2016, p.501).

As I show above however, the Westminster conventions guiding the SPS role are open to wide interpretation. So what does the paradigm say about how the administrator translates them into practice? As Table 2.1 shows, the typical unit of analysis within the Traditional Public Administration paradigm is the system; as a result, scholars working within this paradigm have paid relatively little attention to individuals, though some notable rich biographical accounts have been produced, for example Chapman (1984) and Theakston (1999). Instead, the practices of the administrator are typically summarily described and always with regard to the ministerial relationship: the SPS advises ministers, and executes ministerial decisions (Rhodes 2005, t'Hart 2014, Richards & Smith 2016).

Criticisms of Traditional Public Administration are long-standing and sufficient for some scholars to consider the administrator role conceptualisation discredited (Hughes 2012). These criticisms can be traced back to the 1960s and to the emergence of managerialism. In 1968, the Fulton Report on recruitment to the British civil service famously censured the service for amateurism, and proposed the hiving off of operational functions into quasi-independent agencies (a proposal adopted in the 1980s by the Thatcher government). As O'Toole (2006) observes, these were not the first or last derogatory comments to be made about the civil service, but they were notably direct for a relatively polite era.

SPS were also considered by some, in particular neo-liberals, to be blocking the political will of elected ministers. This was not wholly ungrounded criticism: Fry (1984) quotes an influential Permanent Secretary of the age as describing the role of the senior civil service as influencing ministers towards the common ground, with common ground defined as the place to which the majority of people can be persuaded to move. In parallel, Foster (2001) argues that, for example in Britain in the 1970s, the civil service was more powerful than ministers owing to their permanence and ministerial inexperience.

By the late 1970s, in both the UK and New Zealand, government was not perceived to be working well. Ideological governments in both countries did not want to reach common ground; as a result, the tendency of senior public servants to steer towards the political middle ground were no longer viewed as independent (Fry 1984, Halligan 1997, Ferlie & Steane 2002). Their advice was considered unnecessary by conviction politicians, and their practices of deliberation and consultation were viewed as inefficient, and resulted in suspicion that administrators were protecting their own élite status (Foster 2001).

In the 1980s, managerialism began to take hold internationally, culminating in an array of structural and cultural changes collectively labelled 'New Public Management' (NPM) (Hood 1991). Spurred on by the ideological bent of their governments, New Zealand and the UK became leading cases of governmental embrace of NPM (Hood 1995, Lodge & Gill 2011, Pollitt & Bouckaert 2011). NPM can be interpreted as a confluence of different streams of ideas including, critically, rational choice theory and managerialism (Hood, 1991; Osborne 2006). Rational choice theory placed an implicit assumption of the individual as

self-interested, as motivated primarily or even solely by personal preferences, at the heart of NPM government (Bevir et al 2003). Scientific management studies contributed doctrines based on an idea of 'professional management' as predominant over technical expertise, as completely portable, and as requiring discretionary space separate to political oversight – and as a central requirement to better government performance (Hood 1991). The central ambition of the NPM paradigm was to render government more efficient and responsive to citizens, re-conceptualised as consumers of its services, by injecting business-like methods (Pollitt & Bouckaert 2011).

Structurally, NPM introduced a disaggregation of departments into 'manageable' units as well as greater competition in public service provision, both underpinned by contractualism (in which the state's preferred relationship approach is via a series of contracts – see Lane 1999); culturally it stressed hands-on management through top-down performance management and monitoring, adoption of 'proven' private sector management tools, and an increased focus on financial discipline (Pollitt 1990, Peters 1997, Lane 2000, Pollitt & Bouckaert 2011).

The role conceptualisation associated with NPM is **the manager**. As Table 2.1 highlights, the paradigm of NPM is theoretically rooted in economics, specifically rational choice theory and management studies, representing a fundamental philosophical break from the political science foundations of Traditional Public Administration. Instead of being framed with regard to the maintenance of a strong and stable polity, the new role conceptualisation of manager was orientated towards managerial delivery, and emphasised practices rather than relationships. The primary function of the manager is to

deliver the elected government's agenda, preferably drawing on practices, tools and techniques considered to have been effective in the private sector when doing so (Hood 1991). Strategic planning, performance management, and innovations in financial management were all introduced to enable managers to better control the policy delivery system (Barzelay 2001, Pollitt 2003). As Moran (2003) observed:

"Today's senior civil servant is expected to use managerial skills to produce measured, published outputs from a finely regulated and controlled workforce" (Moran 2003, quoted in Pyper & Burnham 2011, p.202).

Managerial practices are deployed not only by individual managers under NPM, but also throughout the system: within NPM, rather than relying on tacit or self-regulation, explicit evidence is demanded to demonstrate uptake of managerial practices, and to prove implementation success, spurring growth of oversight and audit bodies at the centre of government (Ferlie et al. 2008). The manager, then, both deploys management practices and is subject to them, all being required to report upwards in some form. At the same time, the manager is encouraged to be entrepreneurial, to anticipate and solve public sector problems creatively (Borins 2000), to do what is necessary rather than simply to follow rules. A normative discourse of entrepreneurship pervades NPM, framing it as the way in which managers can deploy private sector (managerial) skills and practices to escape the inhibiting procedures of bureaucracy (Edwards, Jones, Lawton & Llewellyn 2002; Wanna & Forster 1996).

The manager role is widely cast by proponents as a contrast to and improvement upon the role of administrator, with application across all levels and tiers of government. Horton & Jones (1996) for example endorse the chief

executives of newly established government agencies as exemplar 'new public managers'; they and others also point to the rise of the manager in the UK's National Health Service (Ferlie 1996, Learmonth 2003, Mueller, Sillince, Harvey & Howorth 2004) and in universities in both the UK and New Zealand (Fitzsimons 1995, Deem, Hillyard & Reed 2007, Ferlie et al. 2008). However, as these examples illustrate, while the administrator role conceptualisation was expressly developed to define the scope, purpose and practices of SPS in Westminster system governments, the manager role was more generic, intended to apply to the whole public sector.

As a result, the manager role conceptualisation is incomplete for senior public servants: in particular, the traditional practices of advising ministers and developing policy are simply not addressed. Two main explanations are available. First, that NPM was a loose collection of ideas with a shared broad mission to improve policy implementation rather than a coherent single philosophy (Hood 1991), and as such emphasized the new ideas and practices they promulgated rather than presenting a complete model; second, as described above, the new wave of politicians introducing NPM reforms was also suspicious of the influence of SPS and actively sought to reduce their role in policy development and decision-making. In practice, during the heydays of NPM in the UK and in New Zealand, SPS continued to advise ministers, but with the increase in politically-appointed special advisers, and ministers minded to seek input from a plurality of sources inside and beyond government, the SPS's role as policy advisor was significantly reduced and there was a significant orientation to 'delivery' (Dillman 2007, Eichbaum & Shaw 2007).

In the 1990s and into the 2000s critiques of NPM emerged, suggesting that it – alongside Traditional Public Administration – might better be understood as partial theories (Ferlie, Hartley & Martin 2003, Osborne 2006). In particular, scholars began to document and theorise the phenomenon of networks that brought together traditional public actors, bureaucrats and politicians, with people from across the private, voluntary and community sectors around issues of mutual concern (Kooiman 1993, March & Olsen 1995, Kickert, Klijn & Koppenjan 1997, Peters & Pierre 1998, Vigoda 2002). Shifting away from a rational economics assumption of relationships constructed of exchanges based on self-interest, governance theorists drew on ideas such as new institutionalism (Powell and DiMaggio 1991) to suggest that network-based organisations “paradoxically compete by collaborating with other organisations, in order to lever in information, resources and capabilities” (Osborne, 2010, p.187). Networks are interpreted as successful if they achieve reciprocity - mutual benefit over time; and reciprocity relies on trust that is built up over time. The shift to notions of trust and reciprocity, that are not solely rational, can be understood as one of the key signals that governance theorists were consciously seeking to break from the paradigm of utilitarian economics (Andresani & Ferlie, 2006). Government in an era characterised by a complicated landscape of outsourced services was also receiving increased attention (Goldsmith & Eggers 2005, Warner & Hefetz 2008).

So, over the turn of the century, attention shifted, at least partially, to ideas of governance. Key arguments for *governance* over *government* were that relationships with actors located beyond the traditional dyadic ministerial – civil service relationship at the heart of the Westminster model had been poorly captured by both Traditional Public Administration and by NPM (Osborne 2006,

Bevir & Rhodes 2011), and new technological and participatory tools were emerging with the potential to transform governments' relationships (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow & Tinckler 2006, Lodge & Gill 2011). Managing effective and efficient delivery of public services was still important, but did not capture the increasing numbers and types of actors involved in policy development as well as service delivery, nor capture the changing nature of relationships between those actors, in an increasingly technologically-enabled plural and pluralist world (Rhodes 1997).

At the time of writing, no one new governance paradigm has come to dominate in replacement of Traditional Public Administration or NPM, though a paradigmatic shift towards governance seems to have been consolidating (Bevir & Rhodes 2011, Sørensen & Torfing 2016). A number of theories are instead in competition – for example, digital-era governance (Dunleavy et al. 2006, Margetts 2009), collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash 2008), networked governance (Sørensen & Torfing 2005, Stoker 2006), and new public governance (Osborne 2006, Osborne 2010).

The key role conceptualisation relevant to SPS in the current era of governance is the **leader**, described in Table 2.1 as engaged in the negotiation of values, meanings and relationships. Much of the literature on emerging governance paradigms touch briefly, if at all, on the direct implications for SPS (see for example the seminal articles by Agranoff 2006, Dunleavy et al. 2006, Osborne 2006), which has further widened the scope for different readings of the SPS role to emerge. For example, Pollitt & Bouckear (2011) summarise the role for civil servants in a governance paradigm as “network managers; partnership leaders; negotiators; searchers for leverage, synergies” (p.169). Crucially, the

role is now described in terms of its relationship to wider societal actors, and not just government ministers – arguably not even placing the ministerial relationship as most important. However, it can be difficult to pinpoint exactly what the leader role entails, and what it may not; the quotation from Pollitt & Bouckaert (2011) above, as a typical example, leaves much to readers' interpretations.

Governance scholars have invested particular attention in the practices and values of leadership in the arenas emphasized by their new paradigm. Network-based leadership (Kettl 2006) sits alongside collaborative public leadership studies, which have delineated detailed leadership practices appropriate for arenas in which power, knowledge and legitimacy are dispersed across individuals and sectors (Bryson et al. 2015; Crosby & Bryson 2010; Morse 2008; Vangen & Huxham 2003). Practices highlighted include power-sharing, the design of collaboration, and collective management techniques; Getha-Taylor & Morse (2013) highlight a “new emphasis on situation assessment and what might be termed as “process “ and “design” skills” (p.77). The overarching practice that is thus most valued is (successfully) influencing communities into action in response to societal challenges (Heifetz 1994, Brookes & Grint 2010).

As it forms the focus of this study, I discuss the conceptualisation of ‘leader’ and ‘leadership’ in more detail in the next chapter. For the purpose of this overview of major role conceptualisations pertaining to SPS, it is sufficient for now to reflect that, like the ‘manager’, the ‘leader’ role conceptualisation has been developed for broad application to all holders of public office, and as such has not been reconciled to the particular context of SPS. Moreover, the ‘leader’ role conceptualisation is orientated towards new relationships beyond the traditional

constitutional relationships at the heart of TPA, and the managerial relationships of NPM. It prioritises practices that enable relationships and achievement of outcomes across multi-sector, multi-actor networks.

The three role conceptualisations, the **administrator**, the **manager** and the **leader**, are rooted in different paradigms – Traditional Public Administration, NPM, and the emerging governance era respectively – and the assumptions, values and norms associated with each. While I have presented these paradigms as sequential in order to convey the historical roots of each, the role conceptualisations circulating for SPS today are not a resolved product of Kuhnian paradigm shifts (Kuhn 1970) but rather a process of layering. Lodge & Gill (2011) for example find that “no one set of coherent and consistent administrative doctrines reigns in New Zealand” (p.160). Similar conclusions are reached for the UK (Hood & Lodge 2006, Van Dorpe & Horton 2011), though these studies centre on the UK government and not the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. Indeed what dominates today might be described as a messy, fluid trihybrid: despite the contemporary era being described by many as the governance era, far from being dead, managerialism and NPM are thriving (Pollitt 2014) - and proponents of the administrator role continue to argue their case too (e.g., Rhodes 2014, du Gay 2015, Richards & Smith 2016). As Peters (2009) observes, while Traditional Public Administration may have declined as a paradigm for the public sector, “it has not been replaced with any single model that can provide descriptive and prescriptive certainty” (p.8). The result for SPS is that all three role conceptualisations are available, and represent competing ideas about their appropriate purpose, orientation, and practices.

Chapter summary

In this chapter I have examined the Westminster system of government as the institutional and constitutional context for SPS leadership, and emphasized its equivocal nature. I aligned with scholars who place Westminster conventions as ‘myths’ (Bevir & Rhodes 2006, Weller & Haddon 2016), and highlighted three key myths which are considered to continue to have significant influence on contemporary SPS praxis: the ethos of office, the indivisibility of ministers and SPS as the political and administrative élite, and the SPS as guardian of the constitution.

Next, I reviewed the sweep of the literature addressing the role of SPS in Westminster systems, revealing its evolution towards today’s complex layering of notions about the role of SPS. The ‘administrator’ role conceptualisation centred on the SPS-minister relationship, as the preoccupation of both the TPA paradigm and Westminster system conventions, as relating to the permanent bureaucracy. The ‘manager’ role conceptualisation however reflected a shift to NPM values and practices, which became expected of SPS but which were articulated for the public sector in general rather than for the particular function of SPS in Westminster governments. The governance paradigm has then emerged over the turn of the twentieth century, and sought to shift focus to ideas of governance and networks beyond traditional policy-makers and public services – and in doing so introduced a further set of relationships and practices captured in the most recent, ‘leader’, role conceptualisation. Crucially for SPS, the ‘manager’ and ‘leader’ role conceptualisations are silent on the SPS-

minister relationship and constitutional position, and neither reconcile with Westminster system conventions.

For SPS, then, 'leader' emerges as a recent construct that extends messily from preceding role conceptualisations and paradigms - and rather than having replaced them, today competes alongside them for attention. This layering of paradigms and incomplete role conceptualisations, combined with the unwritten and mutable conventions (myths) of the Westminster system, generates significant space for SPS to interpret and enact their roles.

Having thus located the idea of leadership within the evolution of ideas on the role of SPS, I move next to review the (somewhat smaller) literature on the concept and phenomenon of SPS leadership itself.

Chapter 3 SPS and leadership

In this chapter, I examine the literature on the theoretical concept and the social phenomenon of SPS leadership. I contend that neither can be understood without grounding them in the competing paradigms and role conceptualisations presented in Chapter 2, and that current debates on SPS leadership stem directly from tensions between these worldviews. Against this backdrop of equivocal Westminster system myths, and competing paradigms and their associated role conceptualisations, I now sharpen my focus onto what is known about SPS leadership itself.

The chapter progresses as follows. I begin by examining how leadership relating to SPS is theorised. In the absence of a mature dedicated literature, I review two key leadership perspectives relevant to SPS in the literature, public leadership and administrative leadership. These perspectives have possibly had more impact on Westminster system governments than the smaller literature that directly addresses SPS leadership (for example, they are referenced in government and think-tank contributions such as, for example, Coats & Passmore 2008, Hartley & Benington 2011, Institute for Government 2014, Andrews 2015). I then discuss the scholarship that directly addresses SPS leadership, and highlight key contributions that reflect the broad tensions of the wider debates discussed in Chapter 2.

Next, I search for empirical insight into SPS leadership as a social phenomenon, focussing on how it manifests in day-to-day life. I highlight evidence on the expectations of 'leadership' that SPS face, and review the slimmer empirical literature that researches how SPS leadership manifests in

practice. I conclude by reflecting on the focus of existing debates and identifying gaps in extant knowledge and theory.

Theorising SPS leadership

In Chapter 2, I showed that the SPS role conceptualisation of 'leader' has emerged in association with the new era of governance, reflecting the evolution of the public administration literature. Relevant to SPS, two context-specific perspectives on leadership have also emerged, public leadership and administrative leadership. I now survey the context of the mainstream leadership literature, before narrowing in on public and administrative leadership, and then examining conceptualisations of SPS leadership itself.

Context: a burgeoning leadership literature

Scholarship on leadership has flourished in recent years, matched only by a seemingly unending appetite as a society for leadership products (Bligh & Meindl 2004, Allio 2012). An interest in leadership can in fact be traced back centuries – think of Machiavelli's *The Prince* (2005) first published posthumously in 1532 – though the modern leadership literature often begins with an explanation of nineteenth and early twentieth century 'great man theories'. These theories promulgated the idea that individual men's characteristics rendered them great leaders, affording them agency to change history individually, and such men were almost exclusively upper class: "great men were born, not made" (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991, p.48).

In the twentieth century, moved by a greater scientific orientation, great man theories evolved into trait theories (Van Wart, 2003). Scholars sought to

distinguish the traits of leaders that distinguished them from others. Yet Stogdill's influential critique in 1948 highlighted a flawed assumption of universality in such trait theories, and brought situation and context irreversibly into leadership thinking. Traits were decentred, though did return in later studies as explanatory variables (Van Seters & Field, 1990).

Situational theories of leadership thus emerged between the 1950s and 1970s, opening up leadership theory as a teaching tool for the first time; once leadership was no longer seen as a product of innate traits, then people could potentially learn to do it better. However, early situational theories are today critiqued as overly simplistic. They “generally failed to meet scientific standards because they tried to explain too much with too few variables” (Van Wart, 2003, p.217).

Another significant shift occurred in the late 1970s with increasing interest in transformational and charismatic leadership (Hunt, 1990; Bass & Bass 2009). In the seminal 1978 *On Leadership*, Burns (2010) moved away from studying *leaders*, and turned to the nature of *leadership*. He suggested that power is not a characteristic of an individual, nor the preserve of elites, but a relationship between two or more people that taps into the motives and resources of all involved. Further, leadership was a moral endeavour for Burns, who asserted that people in power only become transformational leaders, and so more than just instrumental power-wielders, when they “arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers” (p.18). This notion of transformational leadership as distinguishable from transactional leadership also resonated with a parallel debate on management vs. leadership, bringing it rapid support (see for example, Zaleznik 1977).

Van Wart affords a useful simplification of the sub-fields that then emerged. He suggests that the 'transformational school' emphasized vision and overarching organizational change (see for example, Bass 1985; Tichy and Devanna 1986; Howell & Avolio 1993, Avolio, Bass & Jung 1999); the charismatic school focused on process of influence between leader and follower, and the specific behaviours used to arouse inspiration in followers (House 1977; Conger & Kanungo 1987, Javidan & Waldman 2003); and a less-referenced entrepreneurial school "emphasized practical process and cultural changes" to improve quality or productivity (Van Wart, 2003, p.217).

Theories of ethical leadership emerged in broadly the same period, and overlapped with aspects of these dominant leadership theories of the era, especially transformational leadership, given its proposed rootedness in a moral agenda. Greenleaf's (1977) *Servant Leadership* placed a commitment to service before an appetite to lead, with the individual leader suppressing her own desires in favour of working towards the greater well-being of the community. Similarly, authentic leadership (Luthans & Avolio 2003) shares a social motivation, but its emphasis on being true to oneself, as the meaning of being authentic, rather than placing care and concern for others as paramount means that the two may not always align (Brown and Treviño 2006). Northouse (2017) summarises the facets in focus in ethical leadership as an individual's ethical character, her actions, goals, honesty, deployment of power, and her values. The perspective has risen in popularity since its relatively late emergence as a subject of scientific study, owing to high profile failures of ethical leadership in the business and political worlds (Brown and Treviño 2006).

Since the 1990s, some leadership scholars have sought to construct integrative theories of leadership, a process of reflection and an attempt to consolidate and connect insights emerging from across the rich and proliferating fields of leadership studies (e.g., Hunt 1991; Yukl, Gordon and Taber 2002; Chemers 2014). The challenges of developing integrative models while remaining sensitive to situations and cultures is acknowledged, and accordingly integrative models that are clearly situated – including in government and public services – are beginning to emerge.

This scene-setting review of the mainstream leadership literature cannot possibly do justice to the wealth of knowledge it contains. I have aimed to highlight some of the major themes that public and administrative leadership scholarship draw upon, such as leadership trait theories, situational theories, transformational and charismatic leadership, ethical leadership, and the attempt to produce integrative theories. I now move to examine this situated literature more closely.

Key leadership perspectives: public and administrative leadership

An array of mainstream leadership theories, including some of those briefly surveyed above, have been applied to the world of government and public services - for example, charismatic leadership (Conger & Kanungo 1987, Javidan & Waldman 2003), adaptive leadership (Heifetz 1994, Benington & Turbitt 2007) and perhaps most notably transformational leadership (Bass & Stogdill 1990, Wright & Pandey 2009, Burns 2010) which remains in vogue in the public and administrative leadership perspectives (Van Wart 2013). Many of

these broader leadership theories are promoted to SPS through formal government training, as well as remaining common in the wider media (see for example, Lewis 2016, Leadership Development Centre 2017a); however I focus in here on the two perspectives of public and administrative leadership because they build upon these mainstream theories, and they anchor the concept of leadership into the public sphere.

As I showed in Chapter 2, in recent years a literature has begun to emerge intertwined with scholarship on governance which has begun to articulate a **public leadership perspective** that roots the concept in its specific, bounded context (Getha-Taylor et al. 2011). This distinctiveness is attributed to many factors, such as the contested but shared purposes of public leadership, the motivations of its protagonists, the complex nature of its challenges, an emphasis on collaborative ways of working, as well as to its context of multi-faceted accountability (Bryson et al. 2015). Because the literature on public leadership is relatively new, “fragmentation and conflicting nomenclature continue to be a problem” (Van Wart 2013, p.538). Despite this, a sufficient body of scholarship on the distinctiveness of public leadership has emerged for some to declare it a significant field in its own right (Kellerman & Webster 2002; Getha-Taylor et al. 2011).

Advocates of public leadership locate it as an important response to the globalised environment of the early 21st century, shaped by rapid change and dispersed power (Crosby & Bryson 2010). Citizens turn to governments to resolve challenges produced by this shifting context, but governments cannot address them alone: these are complex problems often arising from combinations of long term trends such as demographic shifts, technological

innovation and globalization, which test not just the technical competences of leaders but also the values and norms of the societies they serve (Podger 2004, Schwella 2008, Brookes & Grint 2010). As such, public leadership is seen to be distinct from corporate leadership, fundamentally shaped by its public purpose and situation (t'Hart and Uhr 2008, Benington & Moore 2011). Public leadership is also distinguished from public management by its framing as “a relational process, rather than a prescribed role”, which “can be enacted through and with a number of people all contributing differently to the process throughout” (Lawler 2008, p.31).

There are three major implications for ‘public leaders’. First, leadership is about responding to and achieving change, collectively. Public leaders collaborate with a wide array of others to achieve their goals (Crosby & Bryson 2005, Ansell & Gash 2008). A number of scholars promote the importance of multi-agency and multi-actor delivery networks (Currie, Grubnic & Hodges 2011, Ferlie, Fitzgerald, McGivern, Dopson & Bennett 2011); others place emphasis on citizen and service user engagement both in co-producing outcomes but also in legitimising policy agendas (Benington 2009, Alford 2014).

Public leaders must thus be able to adapt their style to suit different challenges and arenas: in a world characterised by profound change, managing your own organisation well remains important, but is not enough. Leadership is demonstrated through asking questions (Grint 2005), through innovation (Hartley 2012), and orchestrating change across the community (Heifetz 1994). Further support for the idea that public leaders must adapt their style can also be found in the increasing interest in integrative models of leadership behaviours in the public sphere (Fernandez, Cho et al. 2010, Tummers and

Knies 2015) and in the sub-group of work on leadership development in government (Morse and Buss 2008, Smolovic Jones, Grint et al. 2015).

Third, public leaders need to pay attention to trust. As complexity increases, partners and co-producers need to trust public leaders and each other, both to collaborate and to accept the risks of innovation; at a deeper level, citizens derive value not just from the outcomes that public institutions deliver, but also in having institutions they feel they can trust and which they perceive to operate legitimately (Brookes & Grint 2010, Moore 2013). The need to collaborate thus drives a need to attend to trust, which must be achieved through human relationships (Osborne 2006).

For some, public leadership involves an increased commitment to democratic values too, and as Van Wart (2013) notes is “sometimes called the new public service (Denhardt & Denhardt 2003, Denhardt & Campbell 2006) or public values leadership (Getha-Taylor 2009)” (p.531). Here, “the primary role of the public servant is to help citizens articulate and meet their shared interests rather than to attempt to control or steer society” (Denhardt & Denhardt 2000, p.549). A connected view promotes co-production with citizens; as Alford (2014) explains in his review of co-production since its emergence as a notion in the 1970s, the principle and practice targeted by advocates of co-production is “that not only the consumption but also the production of public services can require the participation of citizens” (Alford 2014, p.300).

Public leadership is not always easy to pin down in the literature. Kellerman & Webster (2002) afford a good example, defining a public leader as someone who creates or strives to create change, however small, and whether or not they hold formal positions of authority. The underlying conception of public

leadership is thus broadly relational: leadership occurs between people. It is “an interactive process between those we call leaders, the people who choose (or feel forced) to be led by them, and the environment in which their interaction takes place” (t'Hart 2014, p.10). Scholars vary in whether they favour constructionist (Grint 2005) or more realist explanations (Bryson et al. 2015) of public leadership but the shift to focussing on the relationships and processes of leadership rather than the traits of individual leaders, within the peculiar context of the public sphere, is shared.

The emerging perspective on public leadership presents some major difficulties when considering its application to SPS in Westminster systems. First, public leadership assumes a normative commitment to broadening ‘democratic’ engagement; as I showed in Chapter 2 however, by convention SPS are meant to be impartial. Second, public leadership addresses processes of leading in terms of relationships between government and the wider public sphere, and in situations where power is dispersed – and remains silent on such processes within government itself; moreover, it does not always account for different constitutional roles, and in particular sometimes fails to make any distinction in the nature of leadership by political ‘leaders’ and by appointed, administrative ‘leaders’ (Kellerman & Webster 2002). Public leadership can thus be understood as comprising an emerging set of ideas that may be helpful to SPS grappling with complex, cross-sectoral challenges but which offers only partial account of what leadership might mean for *them*, and which implicitly and problematically ties them in to certain values such as broadening engagement.

Partly in recognition of these challenges, an even more targeted literature on **administrative leadership** (also known as leadership in bureaucracies or

leadership-in-government) is also developing (Van Wart 2003; Orazi, Turrini & Valotti 2013; Vogel & Masal 2015). Administrative leaders are those holding positions of formal authority in government, or wider public service agencies. Van Wart (2013) distinguishes administrative leadership from the broader notion of public leadership by its focus on “civil service and appointed leaders rather than political leaders”, and an emphasis on “implementation and the technical aspects of policy development over policy advocacy” (p.521).

Administrative leadership is understood to embrace the full range of activities engaged in by post-holders within public organisations to influence others’ actions, values and beliefs (t’Hart 2014); the practices of leadership encompass anything that influences the other parties in those relationships. Practices may be formal or informal; they may be conducted in person or via channels of influence, and they may draw on whichever source of legitimacy the leader can access (Hartley & Benington 2011) – her constitutional position, her professional expertise, her membership of a particular community, her personal charisma. This literature thus seeks to describe and prescribe leadership for administrators across many forms and levels of public organisations (Althaus 2013). By focussing its lens on leadership by appointees at any level in any type of public organisation, however, the administrative leadership literature is not able to take full account of the specific context and conditions for leadership by SPS at the apex of Westminster system governments; SPS uniquely work directly to and on behalf of government ministers, on national policy development and implementation, in civil service organisations with particular cultures, amidst particular constitutional conventions, in a context of heightened political and public scrutiny. All these factors suggest that while SPS leadership may share some similarities to administrative leadership in public service

delivery agencies, or local government, there are likely to be distinct characteristics too.

Within the administrative leadership literature, significant effort has been invested in examining the impact of administrative leadership on the performance of public organisations, and specifying the characteristics of the leaders and processes of *leading* involved. While some studies suggest it is hard to disentangle leadership from other factors (Currie and Lockett 2007), there is some evidence that administrative leadership has a positive impact on the performance of public organisations, and the performance of subordinates (Parry and Proctor-Thomson 2002, Dull 2008, Andrews and Boyne 2010, Fernandez et al. 2010, Hassan & Hatmaker 2014). A number of scholars have then sought to articulate leadership behaviours appropriate for administrative arenas, for example (Fernandez 2005, Fernandez et al. 2010, Van Wart et al. 2012, Tummers & Knies 2016). An array of analyses of leadership characteristics and styles for the newest arena of interest, the multi-sector, multi-actor network have also emerged - such as distributed leadership (Lawler 2008), collaborative leadership (Getha-Taylor & Morse 2013) and integrative leadership (Crosby & Bryson 2010; Sun & Anderson 2012) – but remain to be properly empirically tested (Van Wart 2013). Scholars differ in their framing of leadership as encompassing or running parallel to administrators' managerial tasks, but all pay attention to how leaders can personally motivate and mobilise subordinates and partners.

In his review of administrative leadership, Van Wart (2013) identifies discussions of values as perhaps the single biggest recent enhancement of the field. Newman, Guy & Mastracci (2009) have for example sought to (re)connect

public administrators to compassion; Denhardt & colleagues, to serving the public (Denhardt & Denhardt 2000, 2007; Denhardt & Campbell 2006); and others, to spirituality (Fry 2003; Ferguson & Milliman 2008). It is impossible to adequately summarise these ideas here. However, taken together, I suggest that a key contribution of these ethical, style and character specifications of administrative leadership is that they have helped to normalise the idea of individual administrators as leaders in their own right, who build and hold personalised relationships through which they can influence others both through their formal authority and informally through invocations of values and beliefs. As I show later in this chapter, leadership development drawing on these and similar notions is now standard in contemporary governments.

A further important feature of the administrative leadership literature is an ongoing debate on its underlying purpose. At its simplest, this debate pits a framing of the aim of administrative leadership as *conservation* of the public good, against framings of its purpose as *achieving change*. This debate mirrors the arc of the paradigmatic debate on the role of the SPS charted in Chapter 2. Here, Larry Terry (1998, 2003) is the standard-bearer for the traditional, conservator viewpoint. His core thesis is well summarised by Green (2007):

“... career administrators are obligated to “protect and maintain administrative institutions in a manner that promotes or is consistent with constitutional processes, values, and beliefs” (Terry, 2003, p. 24). The career administrator must therefore play the role of a conservator who, at least in part, protects institutional capacities from the depredations of other kinds of leaders” (Green, 2007, p.141).

While Terry wrote for the American context, his arguments resonate more widely. The idea of administrator as conservator aligns to the Weberian persona of a good bureaucrat (Du Gay 2008, Byrkjeflot & Du Gay 2012), as well as Davis’ description of the SPS as a gyroscope of state responsible for the

maintenance of a strong and stable polity (Davis 2005) (both discussed in Chapter 2). Terry (2015) saw New Public Management as reifying delivery and fundamentally downplaying the primacy of politics in public administration to the extent that NPM risked undermining the constitutional settlement. Green (2007) synthesises the argument as management elevating “instrumentalism, expediency, and competition for short-run gains over the protection of enduring public values such as justice, accountability, representation, and protection of individual rights” (p.143).

On the other side of the debate, the purpose of administrative leadership is integrally linked to achieving change, either technocratically or democratically – tying leadership with ideas of improvement, and innovation (Hartley & Allison 2000, Gabris, Golembiewski & Ihrke 2001, Borins 2002) on the one hand, and/or ideas of increasing citizen voice in public policy and services on the other (Broussine 2003, Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse & Kouzmin 2003, Benington 2009). One contribution has stoked particular furore, and as such is an instructive case. Public value theory (PVT) (Moore 1995, Benington & Moore 2011) prescribes a broad approach to ‘entrepreneurial’ administrative leadership, with the aim of helping senior appointees in governments to successfully address public problems in a way that satisfies the competing values of their multiple stakeholders. PVT has proven popular with practitioners, in part because the theory reflects their experiential knowledge and helps them to make sense of the complexities of governance (Colebatch 2010). PVT has many academic advocates too (including O’Flynn 2007, Alford & Hughes 2008, Meynhardt 2009, Hartley 2011, Prebble 2015, de Jong et al. 2016, Bryson, Sancino, Benington & Sørensen 2017) but it is in studying the critiques that the tramlines of the debate are exposed.

First, Rhodes & Wanna (2007) suggest PVT encourages administrative leaders to undertake roles that are inappropriate, effectively supplanting political leaders and allowing their own normative judgements to drive their actions - becoming “the new Platonic guardians and arbiters of the public interest” (p.406). They interpret Moore’s (1995) entrepreneurial public leader as threatening what they perceive as a clear demarcation in liberal democracies between elected and unelected officials. Their interpretation is defended as a misreading and a failure to acknowledge the nuanced reality of the administrative leader’s job (Alford & O’Flynn 2008); however such arguments do not altogether allay the fear behind Rhodes & Wanna’s (2007) criticism that PVT legitimises greater discretion and independence for administrative leaders: as they point out in a second article, PVT scholars generally interpret the public sector as predominantly populated by both benign organisations and benign leaders (Rhodes & Wanna 2009) and consequently pay little attention to accountability systems to check public managers’ authority, or to reinforcing public managers’ ethics.

Second, building from the first critique, Rhodes & Wanna (2007, 2009) object to the application of PVT to Westminster system governments, “with their dominant hierarchies of control, strong roles for ministers, and tight authorizing regimes underpinned by disciplined two-party systems” (p.161). They suggest PVT holds dangerous assumptions for Westminster systems, adding concerns about the implicit primacy of management, the asserted relevance of private sector experience, and the downgrading of party politics, to their 2007 criticisms. In sum, PVT, as an exemplar of a change-orientated conceptualisation of administrative leadership, is strongly criticised for normalising a loosely-trammelled exercise of bureaucratic power, and as being

insensitive to matters of power and politics more generally (Roberts 1995, Morrell 2009, Williams & Shearer 2011).

Conceptualisations of SPS leadership

In the context of these literatures on public and administrative leadership, it is important to review how SPS leadership itself has been conceptualised drawing on literature that specifically addresses SPS leadership - leadership by permanent senior bureaucrats in Westminster system governments. This draws out similar themes, though because the agent (SPS) and the institutional context (the Westminster system) are specific, the critiques are arguably sharper too. It is notable that the theoretical and normative works addressing SPS leadership far outweigh empirical studies. I summarise three themes, foregrounding new or distinct contributions. The themes are presented in the form of dualisms for clarity, but in reality they are interwoven. They are: individual vs. shared leadership; entrepreneurialism vs. stewardship; and decline vs. modernisation.

A first tension is whether leadership for SPS is framed as an individual or shared responsibility. Advocates of individual SPS leadership typically see a need for better implementation by the civil service, and view individual SPS leadership as vital to improving delivery (Short 2006, Horton 2007, McDonald 2007). Those who frame leadership in Westminster system governments as a partnership between the minister and SPS however tend to emphasize the importance of democratic control (Chapman & O'Toole 2010, Althaus & Wanna 2008). Underpinning this tension is debate on whether the convention of indivisibility of minister and SPS, described in Chapter 2, is today just a myth or

whether it continues to describe how they operate together (Kavanagh and Richards 2003, Althaus & Wanna 2008, Richards & Smith 2016).

Althaus (2013) tries to break the frame of this ongoing dispute by offering a conceptualisation of SPS leadership as a context-specific form of servant leadership, detailing a metaphor of SPS as “trusted expert policy guides as well as the haulers of administrative baggage up political mountains” (p.3). The metaphor is attractive because it highlights dimensions of SPS leadership that are insufficiently accounted for in other conceptualisations - such as its relational nature, the protective and guiding role SPS play for ministers and teams while formally considered subservient, as well as the personal risks sometimes faced (such as defending decision-making in front of parliamentary committees), and navigating situations that are often a matter of strategic, economic and political ‘life or death’. Althaus’ (2013) metaphor has however as yet seen little uptake, or indeed critique.

A second, connected tension lies in views on the purpose of SPS leadership. Here disagreement lies between entrepreneurial and conservator viewpoints. Those advocating a more entrepreneurial view assert the importance of effective and efficient government achieved through delivery of innovation, and drawing on the lessons of NPM. SPS leadership thus concerns managing the public service system and improving the efficiency and management of core functions (Jensen et al. 2014). O’Toole (2006), Chapman & O’Toole (2010) and O’Reilly & Reed (2010) all identify similar conceptualisations of SPS leadership in government publications; Chapman & O’Toole (2010) draw upon a UK government paper to illustrate, which states that civil service leadership is about “...setting direction, igniting passion, pace and drive, taking responsibility for

leading delivery and change, and building capacity” (Cabinet Office 2006, cited in Chapman & O’Toole, 2010, p.8-9). Here, leadership is innately interwoven with ideas of management and performance (O’Reilly & Reed 2011) and as such, SPS leadership is subject to both managerial development, and annual measurement.

By contrast, advocates of conservatorship, such as Theakston (1999) and Chapman & O’Toole (2010), reflect Terry’s (2015) notion of administrator as conservator, promoting the purpose of SPS leadership as guarding the public good, legitimately placed to balance potentially partisan and short-term aims of elected politicians in the interest of a stable polity. In the same vein, Chapman & O’Toole (2010) mourn the passing of what they term ‘traditional’ SPS leadership. They argue for a concept of traditional civil service leadership identifiable by individuals’ positions at the top of a hierarchy, combined with the esteem in which they are held by other officials; and that the traditional practices of leadership revolved around having influence, taking high quality decisions, and ‘setting an example’.

Third, interpretations of SPS leadership can be caught up in the associated debate on whether the Westminster system is in decline or modernising. Decline is framed in terms of an erosion of civil service ethos, and/or politicisation. Accordingly, the values of public servants are much debated. The shift from the administrator’s public service ethos to managerial values of effectiveness and efficiency is well documented (Van Wart 1998, Maesschalck 2004), but is interpreted from very different normative and philosophical positions. A number of prominent scholars aim a strong critique at NPM for wearing down the ideals of traditional civil service (Campbell & Wilson 1995,

Greenaway 1995, Du Gay 2002, Chapman & O'Toole 2010, du Gay 2015), typically arguing for a return to valuing administrators with the skills such as counselling, judgement, discretion and political nous (Rhodes 2014).

'Leadership' is caught up in this critique, interpreted as an evolution of managerialism (O'Reilly & Reed 2011), which as Barberis (2013) summarises, is argued to be self-serving:

"...management has often become the self-serving entity described in this article as managerialism... managerialism is not so much the product of a conspiracy, rather that of a conjunction of factors, often lending plausibility to the need for more management" (p.327).

Barberis (2013) represents the shared concern of these scholars that the manager, unlike the administrator, has not been located satisfactorily within the constitution, denuding it of a strong connection to public service ethos.

Managerialism, he argues, is recursive: it draws on public choice theory, which assumes public servants are ultimately self-interested actors and by breaking the connection to the constitution and valuing private sector models over public service ethos, it risks delivering SPS that increasingly do pursue self-interest, as the career-long socialisation central to the process of becoming a traditional public administrator is no longer required. (A view reinforced by the public choice literature on public service bargains, blame avoidance and bureau shaping, all interpret the Westminster system as a series of exchanges between self-interested actors – see for example Schaffer 1973, Hood 2002, Hood & Lodge 2006, Lodge & Hood 2012, Bourgault & Van Dorpe 2013). Du Gay (1996) suggests that under managerialism the role of entrepreneurial manager is expected to assume ontological priority; doing so, he suggests, will inevitably erode the separation of "*public administration from personal moral enthusiasms*" (p.165, du Gay's emphasis).

Other scholars are concerned that SPS leadership may be influenced by political relationships with external groups. Peters (2002) draws on La Palombara (1967) to call attention to the risks of *clientela* relationships, in which consistent preference is given to one particular interest group over others, and *parantela* relationships in which an external group gains influence over a bureaucracy usually through its connections with a dominant political party (for example, trade unions via a dominant Labour party). The potential for politicisation via clientela or parantela relationships in today's era of governance by network are as yet unclear (O'Toole & Meier 2004, Robinson 2006): SPS are often at the heart of these complex crowds of relationships, and often responsible for making sense of strategic challenges and shaping responses in situations where accountability can be unclear (Osborne 2010). There is logical potential for SPS leadership in these contexts to be externally influenced; the perceived legitimacy of such influence is likely to depend on localised norms.

Nonetheless some scholars dispute the narrative of decline owing to eroding public service ethos or politicisation of public servants. Pyper & Burnham (2011) take a longer view and, like Horton (2006) and Weller & Haddon (2016), suggest that the narrative of decline (as well as the pro-NPM narrative of modernisation) is exaggerated. They argue that a historical analysis shows that the British civil service "has progressively modernised and in a progressive way" (Pyper & Burnham 2011, p.189), taken to mean it has become on the whole less corrupt, more accountable, pluralist and responsive.

The case for decline can however be usefully interpreted as signalling an increased *risk* of SPS pursuing either self-interest or the interests of others outside government. The public service ethos, and values of impartiality and

neutrality, are a fundamental safeguard against the pursuit of self-interest but are not highly valued within some conceptualisations of SPS and administrative leadership. While the risk of SPS abusing their élite privilege may be a legitimate concern, it does not constitute a sufficient argument to return to a Traditional Public Administration model; concerns raised by advocates of NPM in the 1980s about the inefficiency and political interference of traditional bureaucrats remain (Kane 2007); moreover it seems unlikely that the risk of self-interest might be wholly limited to individualist managerialists.

I draw three broad conclusions from this review of theorisations of SPS leadership in the extant literature. First, as Theakston (1999) soberly reflects, “leadership is indeed a particularly problematic concept in a civil service setting, or any public bureaucracy” (p.665). Leadership assigns agency to individuals, and requiring bureaucrats to engage in leadership places their agency in competition with the agency of democratically elected ministers. Second, the debate on SPS leadership at its simplest pits concerns for democratic integrity against concerns for government effectiveness, with scholars prioritising one or the other. None that I have found fully reconciles the two priorities theoretically or normatively. Third, the dominant conceptualisations in the debate are partial, typically drawing on secondary evidence with the purpose of deliberating changes at the system level. So while the academic debate highlights issues of real constitutional and operational importance, it does not capture practitioners’ realities. In the next section, I therefore review the available empirical evidence on SPS leadership.

Empirical evidence on the phenomenon of SPS leadership

In this final section of Chapter 3, I critically examine the sparse empirical research available on the phenomenon of SPS leadership. Like Korac-Kakabadse (1997), my interest is in research that explores how SPS leadership is enacted in practice, and I see leadership actions as “the results of each individual’s interpretation of what they should or should not do, bounded by the discretion inherent in their roles” (p.433). First, however, I highlight a theme in the literature that has charted the emergence of a leadership discourse for national public servants.

Traditionally, the terms ‘leader’ and ‘leadership’ were reserved to political actors in government and the public sphere – ‘Leader of the Opposition’, ‘trade union leaders’, ‘business leaders’, and so forth (see for example King’s (2007) seminal guide to the British Constitution). Today, however, SPS are also expected to be ‘leaders’ and to show ‘leadership’. The emergence of a discourse of leadership in the administrative arms of Westminster system governments is well documented (exemplified by Ford 2006, Chapman & O’Toole 2010, O’Reilly & Reed 2011, Pyper & Burnham 2011, Rhodes 2011, O’Reilly & Reed 2012) and parallels the paradigmatic layering of New Public Management and then New Public Governance on top of Traditional Public Administration as I showed in Chapter 2.

This shift in the discourse surrounding SPS has been significant and today, the term ‘leadership’ is ubiquitous. For example, O’Reilly & Reed (2011) show that in the ten years to 1997, the number of digitally-archived UK public administration documents with ‘leadership’ in the title was 124; in the following

ten years to 2008, that number surged to 1428. New Zealand's State Services Commission, the central agency that oversees the public service, has 'leadership and talent' as a central pillar of its work (State Services Commission 2015); similarly, the British Civil Service (which includes civil servants in the Welsh Government) places emphasis on a 'civil service leadership statement' that sets out behavioural and ethical expectations for 'all leaders' (Civil Service 2016). Even more directly, leadership, often articulated in terms of competences, is today a standard element of SPS' individual job descriptions and performance appraisals (Lodge & Hood 2005, Horton 2007, Leadership Development Centre 2017b; see also Table 1.1). The statement below, from the New Zealand Leadership Development Centre, a unit within the State Services Commission, illustrates:

"In our view, good leadership includes all the essential disciplines of management together with an ability to breathe life into management by aligning people and energising them to pursue purpose and direction. This requires of the leader a particularly highly developed 'emotional intelligence' that includes self awareness and a commitment and ability to learn" (Short 2006, p.6).

'Leadership' is thus consistently framed normatively, with advocates deploying aspirational terms such as "charismatic, pro-active and visionary" (O'Reilly & Reed 2011, p.1090). Such discourse has spread across the tiers. To give an example, this [video](#) of civil servants describing leadership, embedded on the British Civil Service's leadership statement webpage, is apposite (Civil Service 2016). It seems reasonable to assert that Chapman & O'Toole's (2010) analysis of the discourse of leadership in Westminster governments remains valid today:

"Leadership is a hurrah word... Its meaning can be different in different contexts and different circumstances. It is a term capable of various definitions and can be used to justify a wide variety of actions (Chapman & O'Toole 2010, p.1)".

In Westminster system governments today, then, the leadership discourse surrounding SPS is pervasive, normative, and highly mutable.

Turning to contemporary empirical research on the phenomenon of SPS leadership, I observe that few scholars focus on leadership by permanent public servants in Westminster system governments, senior or otherwise; how leadership manifests in administrative arms of governments whose members by convention remain anonymous, and who are constitutionally indivisible from the elected ministers they serve, has been subject to surprisingly limited scrutiny to date. I discuss key contributions rather than themes emerging from this literature owing to the small number of studies in hand; I also focus on current and recent research (1990s onwards), given my focus on SPS leadership in contemporary Westminster system governments.

Theakston's (1999) biographical analysis of leadership in Whitehall offers cases of individual SPS in the British government. Reviewing them collectively, he finds that SPS leadership is constrained by the constitutional and institutional context, as well as by ministerial working styles, both of which can have a profound day-to-day impact on the discretion available to an SPS. He further finds that leadership itself is constituted in terms of articulating and embodying a department's core values, and in the communication of ideas. Theakston's reconciliation of his findings to leadership theories of the time identifies that while ideas of heroic and transformational leadership were prevalent during the lifetimes of some of his cases, the institutional constraints and culture of Whitehall means that it "does not seem to be a natural environment for this type of leader or leadership" (Theakston 1999, p.255). Instead he suggests Terry's (2015) concept of administrative leader as conservator as most appropriate for

SPS, but concludes that this form of leadership may not be enough for politicians wanting 'frame-breaking' institutional reform.

Grube & colleagues analyse the increasingly public role of senior public servants (Grube 2011, 2013a, 2013b, 2015, Grube & Howard 2016). These studies document the expanding public activities of SPS who, under Westminster traditions, are meant to be impartial and anonymous. Nonetheless they document new practices such as speeches and presentations at conferences, alongside the rapid, personal engagement demanded in the arena of social media. Grube (2015) suggests the Westminster tradition of anonymity, based on SPS' hierarchical position below ministers "...has little or no chance of surviving the move to a horizontal approach to social media" (p.93). Via all these channels, SPS are developing independent profiles as leaders beyond the confines of their home institutions; nonetheless, in practice Grube & Howard (2016) find that SPS have typically managed to 'hold the Westminster line' and avoided being drawn publicly into political debates.

A small number of articles review leadership development in Westminster system civil services, often resulting from commissioned evaluation studies (for example, Dawson 2001, Hockey, Kakabadse et al. 2005, Horton 2007, Hartley & Tranfield 2011, McCarthy 2014). These articles focus on the development programmes, and accordingly do not invest greatly in critically appraising the nature of 'leadership' promoted. Overall, they show that a broadly managerial frame of 'leadership' is asserted in such programmes as crucial to public service reform and an enabler of change more widely – and that leadership is conceptualised as comprising individual traits and skills. SPS are encouraged to be 'transformational' (Dawson 2001), both managing effectively and influencing

across boundaries to gain commitment to their department's agenda. These studies show that SPS have been subject to development interventions that reinforce ideas that leadership capacity resides in the individual leader – as Storey et al. (2016) put it, that leadership “...is all about ‘you’ – your drive, your skills, your attitudes, your self-confidence, your communication, your aura, your moral compass, your ego control, your emotional intelligence” (p.598) - but say less about how it is done in practice.

A further series of studies has however sought to explore some of the ‘political’ leadership practices and skills of SPS, in studies bridging local and national levels in the UK, New Zealand and Australia (Hartley, Alford, Hughes & Yates 2013, Manzie & Hartley 2013, Alford et al. 2016). In this usage, ‘political’ refers to influencing practices and skills deployed to “align interests and/or consent in order to achieve outcomes” in situations of divergent interests (Hartley et al. 2013) – situations that are common, but traditionally portrayed as beyond the neutral, administrative leadership role of a public servant. Together these studies confirm that bureaucrats deploy practices typically considered political regularly, regarding them as necessary to tackle the non-routine challenges facing governments today. Crucially, the appropriateness of bureaucrats rather than political leaders deploying such practices is treated by the public servants studied as a pragmatic judgement that depends not on principles but on the degree of controversy surrounding an issue, as well as the willingness or ability of the political principal to act. The authors suggest these bureaucrats, including SPS, exercise significant ‘political’ discretion but broadly remain within traditional ethical boundaries.

Couch (2007) studies SPS leadership in the context of the UK Department for Education. He examines the meaning of 'leadership', as interpreted by SPS. He finds that SPS predominantly frame leadership in relation to training, in relation to the minister, and as a skill. They take for granted that leadership is important at all levels, and share an interpretation of it as comprising practices of 'giving direction' and 'living values' (Couch, 2007, p.162). He also suggests that while SPS are constitutionally subordinate to ministers, they exercise leadership by influencing ministerial decision-taking, and on matters of the rule of law at times "can insist their advice is heeded" (Couch, 2007, p.166). The image afforded is one of engaging in influencing practices that might be described as leadership, but within a conception of leadership as a shared or distributed activity involving them, ministers, and other colleagues.

Finally, Paea's (2009) study of the leadership processes of Pacifica public servants in New Zealand prompts an important reminder that within even this relatively narrowly framed phenomenon, we should expect a diversity of praxis. Leadership not only takes place within specific environmental and temporal contexts, but also intrinsic factors such as culture, gender and career background may all support variance in how leadership is interpreted and enacted.

Given the scarcity of empirical research on SPS leadership, it is useful to expand this review to embrace a further small cadre of studies that address some of the practices of SPS but without the framing of leadership. A handful of studies have analysed those at the very top of permanent administrations in Westminster system governments either individually or as members of the core

executive, alongside ministers and special advisers. I draw attention to three here.

Eminent amongst these studies is Rhodes' (2005, 2011) political anthropology of everyday life in a UK central government department. Here, Rhodes analyses daily events at the top of government departments. Rhodes frames actions as an interpretive performance of government, in which beliefs, practices, traditions, dilemmas and narratives are socially constructed and reconstructed (see also Rhodes et al. 2008). The study serves to illustrate the complex layering of ideas and pressures that influence core executive actors' thinking and their practices. In particular, he observes that Westminster conventions are reconstituted through the significant effort he notices that actors invest in "protocols, rituals and languages" which are invoked as coping mechanisms in the face of pressing challenges (Rhodes 2011, p.280). Within this context, permanent secretaries, as the SPS in focus in this research, work at an unrelenting pace, with little time for reflection: "as with senior managers in the private sector, permanent secretaries spend their time communicating, not thinking; meeting people, not writing papers or developing strategy" (p.110). Permanent secretaries' key practices observed by Rhodes (2011) include mastering the policy brief, working out how to get on with the minister and, increasingly, managerial tasks such as leading the department and leading specific change initiatives.

In parallel, Page (2001, 2003, 2006, 2012) has specialised in studying 'how policy is really made'. Echoing Rhodes (2011), his major finding is that policy development is in practice done by middle and junior civil servants. Ministers and SPS may offer 'steers' at key points, but in practice more junior civil

servants choose when to seek direction, and how to frame the problem about which advice is sought.

Ribbins & Sherratt (2013) examine eight successive permanent secretaries of the UK Department for Education, focussing on their practices around policy-making. They place these practices in the context of the 'dual leadership' expected of ministers and permanent secretaries in the 2012 Civil Service Reform Plan. The five praxes identified can thus also be interpreted as leadership: they describe patterns of influence initiated by permanent secretaries relating to their ministers. They reveal that permanent secretaries engage in a broader array of practices than might often be expected: generating policy ideas individually and collaboratively with ministers; adopting and also – through multiple techniques - resisting ministerial policy ideas. Nonetheless, the authors find that the majority of permanent secretaries feel they spend most time on managerial tasks, but imbue their policy influencing practices with greater importance.

So, to date researching SPS, and especially SPS leadership, is a niche academic activity; nonetheless the scholars who study this phenomenon afford valuable if partial empirically-rooted insight. There is clear evidence of the presence of a discourse and expectation of leadership by SPS. The evidence on how it manifests is however both limited and incomplete: studies point to SPS leadership as influencing ministers, teams and increasingly outside stakeholders, in ways fundamentally shaped by their constitutional and conventional role. Influencing seems to be achieved through creating vision and motivating others, either purposefully or via the example set – including in how

they communicate (or resist) ideas. Above all, the ministerial relationship emerges as both practically and symbolically central to SPS leadership.

Yet in sum, the empirical evidence on SPS leadership is both fragmented and limited. While it may be unfair to suggest, as Peters did in 2002, that the majority of evidence regarding ministers and civil servants is anecdotal (Peters 2002), it is reasonable to conclude alongside Peters & Helms (2012), Ribbins & Sherratt (2013), Manzie & Hartley (2013) and Rhodes (2014) that there is a pressing need for more empirical evidence and analysis of what SPS *do*, if we want to understand how contemporary Westminster system governments function. As Grube & Howard (2016) suggest, “much more work remains to be done to establish how institutional factors and self interest interact with Westminster traditions in different circumstances to shape behaviour” (p.14).

Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have examined the literatures that theorise SPS leadership, and that study it as an empirical phenomenon. I reviewed the public leadership and associated administrative leadership perspectives as two important perspectives that anchor concepts of leadership, to varying degrees, into contexts within which SPS work. The public leadership perspective is tightly connected into the governance paradigm, and is orientated to the challenges of leading across multi-sector networks in order to respond to the fast-paced globalised dynamics of the twenty-first century. The administrative leadership perspective acknowledges such new challenges but has sought to offer a more complete picture of leadership *in* government organisations. In doing so, it has

ignited robust normative debate about the constitutional risk that extending the concept of leadership to unelected government actors poses for Westminster systems.

I then focussed in on conceptualisations of SPS leadership. This narrower literature reflects wider debates on the appropriate role for SPS and I summarised the three conceptual tensions emerging – individual vs. shared leadership; entrepreneurialism vs. stewardship; and decline vs. modernisation. I suggested an underlying contest in these debates between those prioritising government effectiveness and those prioritising democratic constitutional integrity.

Finally, I identified that the empirical research available on SPS leadership is limited. Extant contributions offer useful glimpses into the expectations of leadership now facing SPS, into the day-to-day world of Westminster government departments, into leadership development, and into some ‘political’ leadership practices they deploy. In accordance with leading scholars, however I find that empirical research on SPS leadership is scarce and more systematic studies are needed.

I suggest there is an opportunity for fresh empirical research, and empirically-based theory, to contribute into the predominantly normative debate on leadership by SPS, by revealing how they make sense of leadership in practice and then considering the constitutional implications. In the next chapter, I turn my attention to the potential of the sensemaking perspective, drawn from organisation studies, to support the creation of new knowledge in this field.

Chapter 4 The sensemaking perspective

Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated the richness of the normative debate surrounding the role of SPS in Westminster systems, and SPS leadership - and insodoing showcased the eminent scholarship involved. To offer new insight and argument into this debate thus demands both scholarly quality and relevance. I aim in this study to address the gap in this literature identified in Chapter 3, specifically the relative lack of empirically-based theory on SPS leadership. Galvanized by calls from Simon (1957), Pettigrew (2005), Waldo (2006), Raadschelders (2011) and Liddle (2017) to strengthen the discipline of public administration by making connections into other social sciences, I consciously choose to draw upon the resources of a peer discipline to do so.

In this chapter, I present sensemaking as the theoretical perspective from which I draw conceptual resources to support my analysis. Sensemaking has become a vibrant tradition in organisation studies over the past thirty years (Allard-Poesi 2005, Weick et al. 2005, Hernes and Maitlis 2010, Brown 2015, Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015). I begin by posing three questions: 'Why sensemaking? What is it? And, what influences it?' in order to assess the potential value of the perspective, its constitutive elements, and how it interacts with other factors such as external structures and logics, and intrinsic preferences and motivations. I then review the new conceptualisation of leadership that has emerged within the sensemaking perspective for its potential explanatory power for this study. Last, I review some important criticisms of sensemaking and set out how they will be addressed.

Why sensemaking?

In this study, I start from the premise that organisational (here, government) action in response to strategic challenges is shaped by how key individuals in the organisation notice and frame change, and how they translate those framings into strategic responses (Kaplan 2008). Specifically, I want to cast fresh light on the nature of leadership by SPS as an important governmental response to strategic challenges.

I suggest that the sensemaking perspective affords a theoretical framework and range of constructs directly applicable to an empirical study of individuals as they work to understand and respond to events (Maitlis & Christianson 2014). Sensemaking is applicable to all forms of organising, because it is constitutive of organising: becoming organised is achieved to the extent that individuals' sensemakings reach sufficient consensus to enable a common task to be pursued (Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015). Further, sensemaking concerns "the interplay of action and interpretation rather than the influence of evaluation on choice" (Weick et al. 2005, p.409): it decentres decision-taking, and unhooks us as researchers from assumptions of conscious, rational evaluation and decision processes.

Scholars have thus used the sensemaking perspective as a lens to understand a wide array of phenomena, such as crises (Weick 1988, 1993; Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010), organisational change (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991, Morrison 2002, Balogun & Johnson 2004, Corley & Gioia 2004, Balogun & Johnson 2005, Rouleau 2005, Lüscher & Lewis 2008), organisational politics (Marshall & Rollinson 2004, Hope 2010), and leadership (Pye 2005, Bean & Hamilton 2006,

Humphreys et al. 2012) (discussed below). Recent studies have also sought to embed sensemaking in its context (Jeong & Brower 2008) and sensemaking has been applied in diverse environments – from the music industry (Bougon, Weick et al. 1977, Anand & Peterson 2000, Anand & Watson 2004, Maitlis 2005) to public enquiries (Gephart Jr, Steier & Lawrence 1990, Gephart Jr 1992, Brown 2000, Brown & Jones 2000, Brown 2004, Boudes & Laroche 2009), to virtual settings (Berente, Hansen, Pike & Bateman. 2011, Marshall & Sandberg 2011), as well as – in a handful of studies - to government (Anderson 2009, Abolafia 2010, Coleman, Checkland, Harrison & Hiroeh 2010, Nigam & Ocasio 2010, Audette-Chapdelaine 2016). Consequently, the sensemaking perspective offers a rich, empirically-based literature to support this study's aim of contributing fresh insight on SPS leadership.

The sensemaking perspective also centres on human activity. Following prominent scholars of the field, I locate sensemaking within the practice turn in social theory (Chia & Holt 2006, Jarzabkowski & Spee 2009, Sandberg & Tsoukas 2011, Balogun, Jarzabkowski, Mantere & Vaara 2014, Brown 2015). Both place human activity as their central interest and as the substance for theorising. Academic interest in social practices, in how idealised processes are enacted by real people, has grown since the middle of the last century (see Schatzki et al. 2001). The appeal of practice theory is artfully articulated by Nicolini (2009):

“The renewed interest in practice can thus be interpreted as an attempt to reground the theorising in “what is actually done in the doing of work and how those doing it make sense of their practice” (Orr, 1998, p. 439) and closing “the chasm between practice driven theorising of what people do in their workplace and academic theory-driven theorising about it” (Yanow, 2006, p. 1745)” (Nicolini, 2009, p.1391).

Towards the turn of the century the 'practice turn' extended to management and organisational research (Whittington 1996). Practice theories share four commonalities that together form the roots of their cross-disciplinary appeal.

First, practice theories foreground human activity as the key mechanism that creates and re-creates all aspects of social life. The social world is conceived as "an ongoing, routinized and recurrent accomplishment" (Nicolini 2012, p.3) in which "*everyday actions are consequential* in producing the structural contours of everyday life" (Feldman & Orlikowski 2011, p.1241, emphasis in original). Crucially, agency is not an innate property, but located in what we *do*: we stand off-centre, while our embodied actions are centre-stage.

Second, practice theory encourages a shift in perspective on knowledge and learning: practices consist of patterns of routinized embodied actions. They are shared norms, conventions, rituals, routines, or just ways of doing and thinking. They can be societal, originating outside an organisation, or belong to that particular organisation ('the way we do things around here'). As individuals, we learn practices socially and not just cognitively: "becoming part of an existing practice thus involves learning how to act, how to speak (and what to say), but also how to feel, what to expect, and what things mean" (Nicolini 2012, p.5). Practices come intrinsically associated with values and paradigms interwoven with knowledge, and becoming a practitioner of a practice is a process of socialisation into its associated web of meaning. Knowledge is thus rejected as an external phenomenon to be accessed, and instead exists in the act of transfer, being "constituted and reconstituted in everyday practice" (Orlikowski 2002, p. 252).

Third, practice theory aims to transcend simple dualisms. Practice theory seeks to resolve the perennial dualism of structure and agency, of determinism versus free will: through action, structures are both reproduced and transformed (Miettinen, Samra-Fredericks & Yanow 2009). Practice scholars interested in examining structure and agentic power more typically draw on Giddens' structuration theory (Giddens 1984) or Bourdieu's notion of habitus (Bourdieu 1990) than critical realism; however, as I will set out in Chapter 5, I view a critical realist research philosophy as congruent and appropriate for this study, in particular because it maintains analytical dualism and so helps to avoid conflation between structure and agency.

Fourth, an interest in practices reveals an interest in the social world, therefore in "power, conflict and politics as constitutive of the social reality we experience" (Nicolini 2012, p.6). If practices reproduce or change social reality, then they sustain or challenge the existing distribution of power, inequality and resources. They are thus innately political and, unsurprisingly, subject to constant contestation (Ortner 1984) – for examples see Anteby (2010) and McCabe and Fabri (2012). Put simply, if we are to understand practices, we must develop a deep appreciation of their historical and material context.

Additionally, Miettinen et al. (2009) suggest that practice theory can also helpfully be conceived as two distinct but complementary *motives*. On the one hand, practice theory represents a commitment to detailed empirical research as a means to understanding social and organisational life; on the other, a theoretical motive to overcome perennial problems in social science "such as Cartesian dualism and the agency-structure problem" (p.1312). Miettinen et al. (2009) highlight that the practice of practice theory is itself bestowed with

values, and that scholars – including this one – are attracted to the study of practices for axiological as well as scientific reasons.

Consequently, I suggest a practice-based view of sensemaking is highly appropriate for this study of a social phenomenon that takes place in an environment replete with conventions, norms and routines (Rhodes 2011). Neither sensemaking nor the wider practice turn are yet established in the mainstream of the public administration discipline. Indeed, leading scholars argue that public administration continues to be dominated by quantitative studies (Perry 2012, Ospina, Esteve & Lee 2017), and so the space available to interpretive research is limited. Some notable practice studies have been undertaken on public sector cases (Hoon 2007, Jeong & Brower 2008, Vaara et al. 2010, Kornberger & Clegg 2011, Lodhia & Jacobs 2013) with the aim of affording insight with wider relevance; others have included public sector cases within a wider population (Jarzabkowski & Fenton 2006, Whittington et al. 2006, Mantere & Vaara 2008) – but these have tended to be conducted from the standpoint of disciplines such as strategy, organisational studies and management accounting.

Fewer examples are yet visible within the fields of public administration and management, though the practice turn has notably been applied as a critical lens to New Public Management (Skålén 2004; Deem & Brehony 2005) and governing by network (Denis et al. 2007, Denis et al. 2009, Termeer 2009). Sensemaking in particular has seen little uptake in the leading journals in the field of public administration: applications by Boin & colleagues (Boin, t'Hart et al. 2009, Boin & Renaud 2013), and Baez and Abolafia (Baez & Abolafia 2002; Abolafia 2010) have seemingly not – yet - stimulated significant further

scholarship addressing situated sensemaking in the peculiar context of government.

Adopting a sensemaking lens thus offers an opportunity to add knowledge in two ways. First and foremost, to facilitate the creation of new insight into the under-researched phenomenon of SPS leadership; secondarily, through this application of sensemaking to leadership as a core public administration problem, exploring the potential of the sensemaking perspective to broaden the public administration discipline. Consequently, I turn to the resources offered by a practice-based view of sensemaking for conceptual and methodological tools suitable for this study.

What is sensemaking?

“To focus on sensemaking is to portray organizing as the experience of being thrown into an ongoing, unknowable, unpredictable streaming of experience in search of answers to the question, “what’s the story?”” (Weick et al. 2005, p.410).

When it comes to sensemaking, Weick (1979, 1998, 1990, 1993, 1995; Daft & Weick 1984, Weick & Roberts 1993, Weick et al. 2005, Weick & Sutcliffe 2011) is a good place to start. As Colville (2008) suggests, “there is more to sensemaking than Karl Weick, but it doesn’t make a lot of sense without him” (p.671). Since first writing on sensemaking in the 1960s (Weick 1969), Weick has ‘changed the conversation’ of his field, shifting both academic and practitioner thinking away from the static idea of organisations and towards the dynamic concept of *organising* (Gioia 2006). ‘Sensemaking in Organizations’ (Weick 1995) provides the most comprehensive description of Weickian sensemaking (Maitlis & Christianson 2014). Sensemaking is conceived as an

active process in which people, when facing a moment of uncertainty, try to work out 'what's going on', and then take action based on what they have sensed, with their action itself significant in shaping what they sense.

Weick (1995) sets out seven properties that give sensemaking processes their specific character – and which remain central to conceptions and applications of sensemaking across the organization studies literature (Gioia 2006, Holt & Cornelissen 2014, Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015). In summary, they are as follows. One, sensemaking is grounded in identity construction. When people define the world outside themselves, they do so inextricably in relation to their senses of themselves; two, sensemaking is retrospective, "people can know what they are doing only after having done it" (Weick 1995, p.24); three, enactment happens when actions undertaken on the basis of the initial sense made, then engender real effect in the social environment. Weick (1995) describes this as sensemaking being 'enactive of' sensible environments; four, sensemaking is a social process because people are located in a web of social relationships whether immediately present or not; five sensemaking is ongoing, in that the flux that people must make sense of is continuous, and continuously reconstituted through daily activities; six, sensemaking is triggered by discrepant events that prompt individuals to extract cues, in the form of simplified constructs, from their environment; and seven, sensemaking is driven "by plausibility rather than accuracy" (Weick 1995, p.17): people reach for comprehensible interpretations of phenomena, enabled by simplified extracted cues which may not be accurate but which render 'what's going on' intelligible. I summarise these properties in Table 4.1 below, using Weick's own language:

Table 4.1 Seven properties of Weickian sensemaking (Adapted from Weick 1995, p.61-62)	
Identity	The recipe is a question about who I am as indicated by discovery of how and what I think.
Retrospect	To learn what I think, I look back over what I said earlier.
Enactment	I create the object to be seen and inspected when I say or do something.
Social	What I say and single out and conclude are determined by who socialized me and how I was socialized, as well as by the audience I anticipate will audit the conclusions I reach.
Ongoing	My talking is spread across time, competes for attention with other ongoing projects, and is reflected on after it is finished, which means my interests may already have changed.
Extracted cues	The “what” that I single out and embellish as the content of the thought is only a small portion of the utterance that becomes salient because of context and personal dispositions.
Plausibility	I need to know enough about what I think to get on with my projects, but no more, which means sufficiency and plausibility, take precedence over accuracy.

Interest in sensemaking has proliferated in the decades since the seminal ‘*Sensemaking in Organizations*’ (Weick 1995). It has been widely interpreted and applied, as recent reviews of the field illustrate (Weick et al. 2005, Helms Mills, Thurlow & Mills 2010, Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010, Holt & Cornelissen 2014, Maitlis & Christianson 2014). As a consequence, and following Weick (1995) and Sandberg & Tsoukas (2015), I term sensemaking a perspective, rather than a theory or framework.

Maitlis & Christianson (2014) suggest that the central sensemaking process contains three main ‘sensemaking moves’ that proceed from perceiving cues (noticing), to creating interpretations (framing), to taking action (responding) – building directly from Weick’s (1995) creation, interpretation, and enactment.

While a logical order is discernible, in reality the moves both overlap and are recursive. I introduce each move here.

People are triggered to **notice** events when they experience disruption or dissonance in their flow of understanding about the world. This puzzlement engenders noticing, leading people to bracket, notice and extract environmental cues in order to create an initial 'sense' of what's going on (Brown, Colville & Pye 2015). The scale of disruption needed to trigger noticing, and the types of events involved, however vary across the literature. A strong seam of research has focussed on sensemaking in crises, owing both to the importance of 'getting it right' in such situations and the learning that can be derived from extreme cases (see for example, Shrivastava & Mitroff 1984, Weick 1988, Gephart Jr et al. 1990, Weick 1990, Weick 1993, Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010, Weick 2010). Nonetheless, sensemaking seems not only to be triggered by violent disruptions of people's flow of understanding associated with crises, but also by minor events, which are comparatively under-studied (Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015). Maitlis & Christianson (2014) remind us of the individual subjectiveness of experiencing dissonance, which they describe as ranging from feeling "that something is not quite right, but you can't put your finger on it" to "cosmology episodes" when people experience a profound violation of their expectations of how the world should be working (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p.70).

Both major or minor disruptive events are experienced subjectively and do not always lead to deliberate sensemaking. Indeed, many sensemaking studies can arguably be understood to concentrate just as hard on semi-automatic processes of sensemaking as the more conscious processes that are the

subject of sensemaking's original focus (for example, Vaughan 1997, Brown & Jones 2000, Barton, Sutcliffe et al. 2015). Indeed, as Weick et al. (2005) note, "people often handle the unexpected by normalizing it out of existence" (p.56). This habit resonates for the context of government: a key characteristic of national public services in Westminster systems, drawing on Rhodes' (2011) in-depth study of the UK government, is the presence of an artillery of routines and rituals to mitigate both crises and 'rude surprises', random events which may challenge existing beliefs and practices. These routines and rituals however "are unrecognised and unquestioned" (Rhodes 2011, p.286). I suggest that whether SPS interpret a strategic challenge as routine or non-routine, how they make sense of it remains a key factor in the construction of government responses. To begin to understand the individual sensemaking of SPS then, I therefore need to pay attention both to near-automatic sensemaking, as well as to deliberate reasoning processes. This study is therefore in line with Patriotta & Brown (2011) in regarding sensemaking as giving form to everyday experiences, and Gioia & Mehra (1996) who observe sensemaking resulting from unconscious processes related to actors' practical experience.

Once noticed, the cues that individuals selectively extract from their environments shape their sensemaking, including their framing of the event (or challenge), and the pursuant enactment. These cues can enable as well as delimit noticing, framing and responding. Weber & Glynn (2006) suggest three cuing 'mechanisms': priming (in which the local situational context provides the social cues), editing (where action is constrained by anticipated social feedback) and triggering (where institutions provide the occasion for sensemaking through posing puzzles or foci that demand ongoing attention). These sit alongside, and intertwined with, the influence of intrinsic cues

associated with identity. *Which* environmental cues people extract from events is affected by an array of factors, which I examine after this review of the key moves of noticing, framing and responding.

In the **framing** move, one or more extracted cues are interpreted. Consistent with this study's ontological position, interpretation is here understood as an individualised, cognitive step - located in, and shaped by, a web of social relationships. *Framing* is the process of combining extracted cue(s) with frame(s) of reference, through which meaning is constructed (Jeong & Brower 2008). Applying a frame of reference to a cue involves labeling and categorizing, to create a plausible story of 'what is going on' (Weick et al. 2005). Organising meaning in terms of labelling and categorising immediately results in the cue experienced, the phenomenon, being simplified and idealised. Such simplification is crucial to rendering the phenomenon *sensible*, connecting it into familiar structures of knowledge. Much of the granularity of the actual experience is however lost (Colville, Brown & Pye 2012); and the selection of the frames of reference to be used to give meaning to the cue(s) is necessarily idiosyncratic, because it draws on an individual's bounded stock of resource. As Elsbach, Barr & Hargadon (2005) show, while framing is idiosyncratic, individuals within the same organisational or institutional context may produce similar cognitive framings: local context matters as well as individual cognition.

Framing thus calls an individual's knowledge and experience into play, to connect cues and knowledge structures to construct a plausible account of an equivocal situation. Importantly while that account is linked to the individual's selected plausible explanation of the event or phenomenon, it is also intimately linked to action: "If the first question of sensemaking is "what's going on here?,"

the second, equally important question is “what do I do next?”” (Weick et al. 2005, p.119). Sense is made through action, and therefore the framing account must provide the individual with a basis from which to act, potentially reducing further the set of cognitive categories and typology of actions from which she is likely to draw (Tsoukas & Chia 2002). The framing move generates a plan of action – which may be new, revised or unchanged following interpretation of the extracted cues – and which generates the ground for subsequent action.

Crucially, once a plausible framing is found, individuals tend not to continue their search for meaning – the plausible frame sticks (Weick 1995, Fligstein, Brundage & Schultz 2014). In the context of government, how social, economic and environmental challenges are initially framed may thus have a significant influence on whether and how government intervenes. SPS may generate those framings, receive or repeat them.

Responding is the move in which sense is enacted. Cognition achieves causal power only through action. That is, “when people act, they bring events and structures into existence and set them in motion” (Weick 1988, p.306). In line with a practice-based view of sensemaking (see above), I consider response actions as practices (for similar examples, see also Rouleau 2005, Stigliani & Ravasi 2012). The practices deployed in enactment can be any available within the situated framing generated. Importantly, they include both talking and doing, with *sensegiving* (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991) capturing a central strategy of influencing based on the individual’s sense made.

In enacting practices, an SPS may closely reproduce what has been done before and thus bolster the structures of knowledge underpinning framing; however through the creative process of enacting a practice, she may amend

the stock of practices she draws upon (Whittington 2006), and potentially the underlying knowledge structure and social order too. The relationship between cognition and practice (action) is not linear but recursive: “action serves as fodder for new sensemaking, while simultaneously providing feedback about the sense that has already been made” (Maitlis & Christianson 2014, p.84).

Individual sensemaking thus involves an ongoing flow of noticing, framing and responding that occurs in a social context. Individuals’ framings can influence others or be influenced by them, shifting their own framing; they also contribute to the stock of interpretive structures - the frames of reference, stories, routines, norms, conventions, ways of doing and other knowledge structures – available to future sensemaking generally.

In response to calls for ontological clarity (Maitlis & Christianson 2014), I interpret sensemaking as a socially-situated, individual cognitive process. Following Kaplan (2008), and Elsbach et al. (2005) cognition is seen as situated, interactive and temporally bounded. Departing from early sensemaking studies, however, the definition applied here embraces both conscious and sub-conscious meaning structures, so including how SPS draw on tacit as well as explicit knowledge (Rouleau 2005, Tsoukas 2005).

Sensemaking is still understood to be social because individuals are rooted in their social contexts: the first two steps of the process of sensemaking under analysis (noticing and framing) are understood as occurring within the individual, with the practices that constitute responding undertaken socially, recursively enacting the environment for the next cycle of sensemaking.

The nature of sensemaking is also teased out by comparing it to interpretation (Gioia 2006). The sensemaking process is argued to subsume interpretation

because sensemaking embraces not only cognitively interpreting events, but then also accounts for action too – treating action as constructive of sense, not a result of it. Action shapes interpretation retrospectively, and meaning emerges progressively as actions define our understanding of what is going on (Colville & Murphy 2006). As Weick (1988) asks, “how can I know what I think until I see what I say?” (p.307).

What influences sensemaking?

As for all human processes, sensemaking is socially situated, and is shaped by the context within which it occurs (Helms Mills et al. 2010, Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015). The actors in this study, SPS, are located in large, highly routinized government institutions. Here, I provide a review of key influences on individual sensemaking, focussing on the influences I judge most relevant to SPS: identity; external schemas, practices and logics; power, legitimacy and social standing; and the immediate context. While I treat each factor separately to facilitate understanding, in reality these factors, and perhaps others, interact to generate the particular context for each moment of sensemaking.

Identity is central to sensemaking: the first of Weick’s (1995) seven properties identifies sensemaking as grounded in identity construction. Identity is not static but continuously evolves in the flow of sensed experience: “our understanding of who we are both provides continuity (a life history), but is also being continually reconfigured in relation to our experience” (Cunliffe & Coupland 2012, p.28). Identity is defined in relationship to others through sensemaking processes that are culturally, historically and socially situated (Karreman &

Alvesson 2001). Identities afford cognitive schemas through which to perceive the world, sets of relationships, and emotional investments through which people feel connected to others who share the identity (Melucci 1995).

In the sensemaking literature, particular attention is paid to work roles within individual identity (Patriotta & Lanzara 2006, Mantere 2008, Maitlis 2009, Petriglieri 2011, Brown & Toyoki 2013). Mantere (2008) finds that externally-imposed role conceptualisations can both enable and inhibit middle manager sensemaking during change. In Chapter 2, I presented the competing externally-imposed role conceptualisations – administrator, manager, leader - available to SPS in Westminster systems as they construct their work role conceptions. The sensemaking perspective suggests that these internalised role conceptions are not just one influence, but are central and defining of how SPS see the world and how they act, as people are engaged in a constant struggle to resolve their self-definition with their work roles and situation (Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003).

People can hold both multiple work role conceptions (e.g., employee, lead for project x , member of division y), as well as identities beyond their work roles (Humphreys & Brown 2002, Weber & Glynn 2006). Identities beyond core work roles may be rooted in an individual's institutional, organisational or social group location. For example, Abolafia (2010) shows how one group of policymakers' scholarly identities (schools of economic thought) primed their practices within group discussions, and steered them to advocate policy outcomes consistent with their identities – showing that individual identity can be a powerful influence on policymakers' practices.

Additional identities beyond work roles include identifying as belonging to a profession, with its associated practices and knowledge base, such as medical professions or accountancy (Korica & Mollow, 2010; Bévort & Suddaby 2016; Pratt & Rafaeli 1997); and/or to a social group such as a nationality, gender, age group (Lau & Murnighan 1998, Salk & Shenkar 2001, Bird 2007). Such identities are sometimes defined as having both normative as well as utilitarian dimensions (Glynn 2000, Moss, Short, Payne & Lumpkin 2011). SPS may thus hold professional identities (e.g., economist, accountant, lawyer, policy specialist), alongside identities connected to their social positioning (such as Māori, Welsh, middle class), as well as identities relating to their value positions (e.g., environmentalist, Buddhist, feminist, pragmatist).

The normative dimension of additional identities is both important and problematic when considering SPS. It is important because the espousal of values is central to sensemaking, acting as the glue that sticks together fragments of experience, and insodoing (re)affirming the coherence of the individual's identity (Maclean, Harvey & Chia 2012). The prominence of values is however potentially problematic for SPS who are supposed to be politically neutral, objective and impartial (O'Toole 2006, Du Gay 2009). Moreover, Sveningsson & Alvesson (2003) suggest that when people find work roles problematic, they draw more heavily on a self-identity based on "personal history and orientations 'outside' the immediate work context" (p.1185). Their alternative identities become more important in their self-presentations which, the sensemaking perspective implies, then become prominent in how they see the world, and the practices they select. By extension, we might thus expect SPS who struggle to generate a coherent role conception from the multiple

paradigmatic role conceptualisations available, to draw more upon alternative identities – including their own normative positions - to fuel their sensemaking.

Teasing out the mechanisms through which identity affects sensemaking, and vice versa, is however tricky because the two are often presented dualistically, and the relationship is under-theorised (Brown 2015). Two mechanisms are clear in the literature: threats to identity can form a trigger for sensemaking; and, identity primes and edits framing and enactment (and vice versa).

Individuals construct their identity “to meet human needs for self-enhancement, self-efficacy, and self-consistency (Erez & Earley, 1993)” (Maitlis & Christianson 2014, p.73); however when any of these are threatened, individuals experience equivocality, and are prompted to engage in sensemaking in response, with the aim of restoring a sense of identity coherence and distinctiveness (Weick 1995, Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003). Ibarra and Petriglieri (2016) for example, find that middle-ranking women leaders in male-dominated organisations craft socially acceptable leadership identities that, whilst authentic, fail to conform to prototypically male cultural prescriptions for leadership behaviours, and receive feedback that discourages them from progressing to top leadership posts. They also illustrate that as well as identity threats triggering the women’s sensemaking, individuals’ multiple identities (here, as ‘a woman’ and as ‘a leader’) influence both the framing of what is going on, and the practices the individual selects. Identity can thus be expected to have significant and multiple impacts on how SPS make sense of their environments.

The second set of influences on individual sensemaking comprises **external schemas, logics and practices**. A number of scholars promote the importance of cognitive schemas in constituting sensemaking, as well as those schemas

being modified or generated through enactment (for example, Balogun, Huff et al. 2003, Lüscher & Lewis 2008, Cornelissen, Mantere et al. 2014). Interest in cognitive schemas was stimulated by Weick (1995) who described the enacted environment as originating in “mental models of causally connected categories” (p.37). Cognitive schemas are internalised mental frameworks that operate at a range of levels. Sandberg & Tsoukas (2015) describe general schemas as cultural templates or ideologies operating at national, regional, industrial or sectoral levels, and specific schemas as tacit knowledge the individual has ‘internalised’ as a result of their socialisation into a particular group. I suggest the conflation of internalised schema with external causal structures is analytically unhelpful. Instead, and consistent with the distinction made in Chapter 2 for external role conceptualisations and internal role conceptions (Stout 2012), I distinguish between the external and internal, with internal cognitive schemas being individual, and general schemas better understood as structural logics or practices.

The influence of structural logics on sensemaking, connecting micro to macro, is a relatively late development in the sensemaking perspective. Weber & Glynn (2006) have noted that sensemaking tends to neglect the “role of larger social, historical or institutional contexts in explaining cognition” (p.1639; see also Taylor & Van Every, 2000), something that has been acknowledged by Weick himself (Weick et al., 2005). Structural logics are labelled variously across the sensemaking literature dependent on scholars’ methodological stance, including as structures, institutions, (dominant) logics, operating models, dominant stories, organizational culture, practices and discourse (Harris 1994, Keast, Mandell et al. 2004, Ravasi and Schultz 2006, Abolafia 2010, Helms Mills et al. 2010, Nigam & Ocasio 2010, Weber & Glynn 2006, Geiger &

Antonacopoulou 2009). Weick (2012) suggests that such structures offer day-to-day utility as interpretive resting points, but also over-simplify what is going on, and blinker people to cues that are inconsistent with the plausible frame they have afforded: they lead us to “notice fewer cues and ignore even more. We enact our anachronisms. But that’s not inevitable...” (Weick 2012, p.150).

The structures available to SPS sensemaking, located in highly routinized institutions of government (Rhodes 2007), are manifold. Westminster system conventions can be understood as a pattern of practices containing an associated web of meaning and set of behavioural expectations that are only partly codified. There is also a further array of organisational routines within government administrations, often concerned with ensuring procedural fairness; those surrounding human resources and procurement processes are prominent examples, though other scholars suggest a service logic too (Osborne, Radnor et al. 2013). Finally there may also be an array of localised norms unique to SPS’ context, described in the literature as relating to local culture or ‘how we do things around here’ (Albert & Whetten 1985, Brown & Gioia 2002, Bean & Eisenberg 2006). All these schema operate consciously and sub-consciously as individuals make sense of environmental stimuli (Harris 1994). They also have “considerable plasticity” because they are defined socially and locally, and thus subject to multiple interpretations (Weick et al. 2005, p.411).

Third, a subset of the sensemaking literature emphasizes questions of **power** and **legitimacy** (Marshall & Rollinson 2004, Helms Mills et al. 2010, Brown et al. 2015). Helms Mills et al. (2010) for example critique Weick for “an under focus on issues of power, knowledge, structure, and past relationships” (p.188). Instead, by paying attention to power, these authors suggest we begin to notice

that sensemaking can privilege some identities over others, and can contribute to the (re)production of power structures. Sensemaking processes inevitably contribute to power dynamics because they are socially located, “caught up in political machinations... sensemaking is both an effect, and productive, of what are continuously negotiated relations of power” (Brown 2015, p. 269).

Such observations are made about sensemaking within generic organisations, and the wider social order. Transpose the critique to the context of government, which is entrusted with unique authority in society to regulate (tax, imprison, set laws for) citizens, and issues of power are brought into sharp relief. Political scientists offer a rich array of lenses which can helpfully supplement sociological framings of power for a study focussed on sites of government. Yet the concept of power is itself mutably defined (Hay 1997), with different theorists emphasizing dispositional power (money, knowledge, personnel, weapons, reputation, etc.), relational power (A influencing B), organisational power (organizations, resources, rules, bargaining), discursive power (knowledge, discourses), transitive power (A achieves something at the cost of B), or intransitive power (A and B achieving something together) (Arts & Van Tatenhove 2005). Within this debate, scholars also accentuate either structural or agentic power.

One influential critical approach is afforded by Lukes’ three faces of power (1974). Lukes builds on Dahl (1957), and Bacharach and Baratz (1962), to suggest that power takes three forms: first, in the behaviour of individuals when taking decisions in the context of conflicting interests; second, in influencing the agenda around decisions; and third, in the generation of structural conditions which shape others’ behaviours and preclude conflict over interests arising

(Lukes 1974). Power is thus present and exercised in the context of structural factors that shape individual identities and sensemaking, that typically maintain extant power relations; however, power is also available to SPS to exercise (in Lukes' first two forms); if an individual can influence decisions, or even shape others' sensemaking in government, she can be understood to hold some power over the direction of policymakers' attention, over how they interpret the environment, and ultimately over the deployment of government's resources. Foucault (1990) reminds us that power is everywhere; however contrary to critical scholars such as Lukes, and more consistent with the sensemaking notion of equivocality, he also highlights that power can be a positive, productive force and not solely an instrument of repression. In sum, SPS' privileged institutional position in government means that this study cannot ignore the multiple faces and potentiality of power; SPS undoubtedly inhabit roles that afford significant opportunities to influence the construction of social reality in government.

The exercise of power is tightly linked to questions of legitimacy (Brown 2004). Across the sensemaking literature, Suchman's (1995) definition of legitimacy is commonly adopted: legitimacy is "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman 1995, p.574). One important theme highlights that claims to legitimacy are used to defend incumbents' hold on public power. A number of critical scholars examine the reconstruction of sensemaking patterns following crises, in the officials reports of public hearings and inquiries (Gephart Jr et al. 1990, Brown & Jones 2000, Brown 2004, Boudes and Laroche 2009, Topal 2009, Guimarães and Alves 2014). They consistently find that the sense created reinforces

institutional power structures and powerful social groups, legitimating their ongoing dominance. This finding raises the suggestion that sensegiving by those in any position of authority, including SPS, is thus not a neutral act but hegemonic, inevitably benefiting those who exercise it (Brown et al. 2015).

In the (critical) sensemaking perspective, scholars often root their critiques in seminal sociological works by, for example, Clegg (1989) and Suchman (1995) (see for example, Humphreys & Brown 2002, Brown 2005, Maclean et al. 2012). These are revealing and relevant to this study, but public administration scholars offer a more granular analysis attuned to the context of government. They articulate at least four different sources of legitimacy that those working within public bureaucracies can draw upon: political or constitutional legitimacy, concerned with fit with the political system; rational-legal legitimacy, concerned with fit with the rule of law; managerial legitimacy, concerned with the efficiency and effectiveness of government administration; as well as wider sociological legitimacy (for examples, see Weber, 1978; Stoker 1998; Lynn Jr 2001; Peters & Pierre 2003; Olsen 2006; Waldo 2006; Hughes 2012; Stout 2012; Terry 2015). When SPS as actors within Westminster systems make legitimacy claims, they may indeed in part be seeking to reinforce their ongoing privileged positions of power, and the above public administration scholars indicate they may invoke an array of different claims to legitimacy to do so.

Abolafia's (2010) examination of policy development within the US Federal Reserve, a governmental setting, is perhaps the most relevant single study of power, legitimation and sensemaking to this study's governmental context. Reflecting March & Olsen (2004), Abolafia (2010) determines that 'what is appropriate' is the key to legitimacy and therefore to the group's wielding of

power. He shows that the logic of appropriateness is “based on sedimented assumptions and understandings about ‘proper’ relationships” (p.363) which form an inherently conservative shared operating model amongst the group. The operating model narrows, but also facilitates and rationalises the policy responses they reach. The model is further reinforced by a “scaffolding of emotional language” (p.365) which helps to return the group to their dominant operating model when unexpected events trigger dissonance. Crucially, then, Abolafia (2010) shows that legitimacy is a central concern for policymakers, and is strongly shaped by cultural approval, by the norms and values within the group, and as perceived in wider society.

A final source of legitimacy that is rarely discussed with regard to public servants is personal, or charismatic, legitimacy (Weber 1978, Suchman 1995). Personal legitimacy is discussed as one of three forms of legitimate social orders - traditional, charismatic and legal-rational - in Weber’s classic typology (Weber 1978); it is also negatively associated with the simple wielding of power in authoritarian regimes (Dogan 1992). I suggest however that it is a useful concept when transposed to the individual level; individual personal legitimacy is important to how we make sense of leadership. As Suchman argues:

“... the literature offers numerous assertions that individual “moral entrepreneurs” play a substantial role in disrupting old institutions (Weber, 1922: 245) and in instituting new ones (DiMaggio 1988)” (Suchman 1995, p.581)

So to lead change effectively, personal legitimacy helps. This is further reinforced by the extensive literature on charismatic leadership – see for example (Conger & Kanungo 1987, Shamir, House & Arthur 1993, Avolio & Yammarino 2013). From a different theoretical perspective, Lockett, Currie, Finn, Martin & Waring (2014) show an individual’s social positioning is central to

her sensemaking about enacting change in face of a challenge. They find that those who have networks beyond their profession feel better able to make sense of the problems of enacting change, and those who have cultural capital (reputation) feel able to develop relationships to overcome the potential problems of enacting that change (Lockett et al. 2014; see also Levy et al. 2015, Safavi & Omidvar 2016).

These ideas all suggest that an individual's legitimacy and power position amongst networks within and beyond her professional group – are important influences on, and enactive of, her sensemaking, especially when she is likely to need to enact change. For an SPS who is formally impartial and subservient to elected ministers, however, the idea that she has individual legitimacy is itself equivocal: it implies independent influence that may be helpful to achieve ministers' goals, but also owing to its independence may potentially be used otherwise.

Finally, alongside identity factors, and social and institutional influences, the sensemaking perspective encourages us to take account of the **immediate action context** (Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015). Two factors discussed in the literature hold particular pertinence for SPS facing strategic public challenges: ambiguity/equivocality, and the intensity of the flux experienced. The idea of ambiguity, or its alternative rubric of equivocality, is central to sensemaking: “this idea of equivocality (or ambiguity) is big — maybe one of the most important in understanding human sensemaking and organizing” (Gioia 2006, p.1711). Ambiguity is the condition that triggers sensemaking (Weick 1995, Weick et al. 2005). Both Colville et al. (2012) and Brown et al. (2015) however suggest equivocality is a more accurate term, seeing it not as a condition in the

environment 'out there' but one that is generated and reduced *through* human action. Action itself clarifies by shaping what it is that you pay attention to and through enactment, shapes what is going on (Colville et al. 2012, Brown et al. 2015). Equivocality is thus an antecedent to sensemaking processes and potentially a product of them – people's own actions may construct later equivocality for themselves or others (Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015).

Equivocality is inherent to the context of government (Chun & Rainey 2005, Bryson, Berry & Yang 2010, Rhodes 2014). When faced with strategic public challenges, SPS and other policymakers rarely have access to complete information, and 'what should be done' is continuously contested, with positions often rooted in competing value stances (Noordegraaf 2000, Roberts 2000, Head 2008, Head & Alford 2015). Noordegraaf and Abma (2003) suggest that equivocality "explains why interpretive spaces exist" (p.862) in which governmental actors must then make sense of events. The notion of 'interpretive space' is interesting because it suggests that its dimensions may vary: an SPS may experience more or less equivocality and more or less interpretive space, which may affect her sensemaking.

The 'immediate action context' secondly draws attention to the intensity of the dissonance or flux experienced (Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015). SPS facing strategic challenges may experience those challenges as anything from large-scale events, to everyday sensemaking. It is logical therefore to anticipate variance in the pressure they feel in their immediate context, owing to differences in both the external cues and how they are received. Short moments may have large consequences (Weick et al, 2005, p.410). For example, Colville et al. (2012) suggest the current era is characterised by

dynamic complexity which demands “quick and coordinated responses to events that are unfolding at such great pace that they threaten organizational and personal survival, let alone success” (p.6). Individuals’ interpretive space is under huge time pressure, but the tools –logics, stories, schema - for making sense of them do not always keep up (Colville et al. 2012, Gioia, Nag & Corley 2012). The ‘immediate action context’, comprising these two dynamics of equivocality and intensity, is thus suggested to influence sensemaking significantly.

This review of the sensemaking literature for the key factors that influence the core process of sensemaking - identity; external schemas, practices and logics; power, legitimacy and social standing; and the immediate context - is now concluded. I now shift to considering the treatment of ‘leadership’ in the sensemaking perspective.

Sensemaking and leadership

Through a sensemaking lens, the practices of leadership can be understood as the management of meaning (Smircich & Morgan 1982, Drath & Palus 1994, Pye 2005, Foldy, Goldman & Ospina 2008). If leadership is understood as a relational process that takes place between people (Uhl-Bien 2006, Cunliffe & Eriksen 2011, t'Hart 2014) then the practices of leadership can be located in the construction of meaningful explanations of events and experiences (Drath & Palus 1994). Pye (2005) explains this view of leadership through a case study of a chief executive (CE) of a retail organisation. Here, the leader provides a framing of the challenge through what she says, and does; critically, her

leadership is only considered 'successful' if the framing offered is accepted by followers and reflected in their sayings and doings. Similarly Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991) coin the term 'sensegiving' to describe when a leader is "supplying a workable interpretation [of an ambiguous situation] to those who would be affected by his [sic] actions" (p.443).

In early studies, the purpose of sensegiving (or meaning-making) was perceived to be the reduction of equivocality for followers, by those in formal leadership positions, articulated in the context of organisational change (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991, Thomas, Clark & Gioia 1993, Gioia, Thomas, Clark & Chittipeddi 1994, Dunford & Jones 2000). Today, there is increasing recognition that *maintaining* some equivocality in sensegiving can be strategically useful to leaders, because it demands deployment of discretion and creativity by followers, thereby encouraging innovation (Davenport & Leitch 2005, Gioia et al. 2012, Sillince, Jarzabkowski & Shaw 2012) (which also reflects Smirchich and Morgan's (1982) emphasis on shared responsibility for sensemaking as an enabler of organisational adaption).

Further, scholars have begun to examine sensegiving beyond top organisational leaders, in situations in which power is more distributed (Rouleau 2005, Maitlis & Lawrence 2007, Kaplan 2008, Hope 2010, Humphreys et al. 2012). SPS are, similarly, important strategic actors in their contexts, but are neither at the very top of the hierarchy nor often in a position to drive a response to a strategic challenge alone. The picture that emerges from this seam of the literature is one of sense being constructed between people, sometimes through contest, with sense and contest grounded in identity. An individual's self-identification significantly shapes her actions: Maitlis &

Lawrence (2007) find that those who identify as leaders respond to complexity in the environment, but those who identify as stakeholders are prompted to offer sensegiving only when they feel the leader(s) is/are incompetent to address a challenge they see as important. So, an individual's sense of the legitimacy of their own agency as a sensegiver (i.e., as a leader) is both an enabler to leaders acting, and a barrier to stakeholder action.

Kaplan (2008) identifies that people at similar levels – i.e., where there is no definitive leader - engage in 'framing contests', in which they employ a variety of influencing practices in order to "transform their own cognitive frames of a situation into predominant frames" (p.729). She observes that individual actors first promote the legitimacy of their frames, and should that fail they secondarily claim legitimacy for themselves. They also seek to ally their frames to those proximal to their view, as a means to garner support; frames are selected and promoted not simply for rational choice reasons, but also for political purposes (e.g., helping to get a promotion) and as a means to protect or enhance identity (e.g., being seen as an expert) (Kaplan 2008). Framing is again viewed as a hegemonic activity, imbued with power and self-interest.

As this discussion reveals, in the sensemaking perspective, leadership is construed as the *work* of meaning-making, or a sensegiving *process*, constructed of practices of being, talking and doing, which occur between people in a social, and therefore power-saturated, context (Pye 2005, Foldy et al. 2008). Legitimacy concerns become central to successful leadership: followers judge the sense being offered, and the leader's agency as sensegiver, against locally appropriate norms. Intriguingly, Baez & Abolafia (2002) find a distinction in how leaders in government with different identities (and power positions)

sensegivers about challenges. *Incumbents* are likely to defend their positions, adopting marginal innovations and so “do new things in old ways” (Baez & Abolafia 2002, p.546); outside *challengers* are more comfortable with equivocal framings and are more willing to contest framings and to innovate; and *integrators* prioritised stability while trying to mainstream new routines. This suggests that individual leaders’ self-perceived power positions within their peer group hold significant sway in their responses to strategic challenges.

Analytically, building on these studies, I conceive of leadership as a set of practices that take place within the responding step of the process of sensemaking (noticing, framing, responding). Leadership practices make meaning for others, and are therefore also enactment, directly bringing “events and structures into existence and set[ting] them in motion” (Weick 1988, p.306), and doing so indirectly via reproduction or modification of practices and structures. The literature on sensemaking and leadership is relatively recent, and to date has emphasised the process of leader meaning-making for (or with) others. The conditions that enable that process have received less attention.

As the uptake of the sensemaking perspective indicates, many academics perceive it to offer valuable insight into a broad array of social phenomena, including leadership. Sensemaking is however not without its critics, and it is to these scholars I now turn.

Criticisms of the sensemaking perspective

Having discussed the core processes of sensemaking, some key influences on them, and then the conceptualisation of leadership to date in the sensemaking

perspective, I now review some key criticisms, to bring to the surface potential weaknesses of the perspective, before summarising how I propose to address them.

It is important to acknowledge that sensemaking has been widely applied, but rather less scholarly attention has been spent examining and refining it (Anderson 2006, Vogus & Colville 2016), though a recent spate of reviews has been more critical (Allard-Poesi 2005, Brown et al. 2015, Holt & Cornelissen 2014, Maitlis & Christianson 2014, Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015). The main criticisms relevant to this study are: a vagueness in definitions of both 'sense' and 'process'; inattention to the social context; and disagreement as to when sensemaking occurs. I also briefly touch upon criticisms related to artefacts, embodiment and emotion, and to the neglect of prospective sensemaking.

The core concepts of sensemaking are often invoked as general, vaguely defined notions (Maitlis & Christianson 2014). Even in seminal works, concepts like 'sense' and 'process' are explained differently; for example Sandberg & Tsoukas (2015) observe 'sense' described as an outcome of interpretation, as a process, as intellectual grasp of ambiguity, as perception, as meaningfulness, as understanding, and as reflection – with the last five descriptions all coming from Weick himself. (The ambiguity of Weick's own concepts is in part due to his unconventional non-linear, reflective writing style (Van Maanen 1995, Czarniawska 2005, Basbøll 2010) as well as the evolution of his ideas from the 1980s to 2010s). The concept of process is also variously deployed. Maitlis & Christianson (2014) highlight different assumptions surrounding whether sensemaking processes occur *within* or *between* individuals; Sandberg & Tsoukas (2015) further detect a lack of exactitude in defining how the different

moves of the sensemaking process (noticing, framing and responding) inter-relate, and suggest explanations of how enactment occurs are “notoriously slippery” (p.519). Sharpening these concepts demands both analytical precision and ontological clarity, as the understanding of how sense and action interact rests on one’s fundamental philosophical position (Maitlis & Christianson 2014, Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015).

A second major criticism of many sensemaking studies is their lack of attention to the innately social context in which sensemaking takes place. This gap elicits two responses in the literature. Some scholars emphasize the need to locate sensemaking more clearly in a web of power relations, in which all sensemaking and sensegiving holds political motive (Helms Mills et al. 2010, Brown et al. 2015). Power dynamics are argued to be inherent in social relationships, and advocates suggest a critical sensemaking approach is crucial to understanding both agency, and the (re)production of structures that empower some groups and limit others (Helms Mills et al. 2010). By paying attention to power in sensemaking, it is suggested, better connections can be made between micro-practices of noticing, framing and responding and macro-structures such as schemas, practices and dominant logics (Weick et al. 2005, Brown et al. 2015). Other scholars have responded to the need to address social context by defining sensemaking as a social process that occurs between people, rather than a cognitive process that occurs within individuals (Maitlis & Christianson 2014); today, more sensemaking studies now treat sensemaking as a collective process, emphasising discourse, narrative, social practices, than as a cognitive process emphasising individual pathways and processes (Maitlis 2005, Maitlis & Christianson 2014). Collective sensemaking may be on-trend, but as Brown et al. (2015) observe, no one standpoint has fully replaced its alternatives:

“...there is no consensus on whether sensemaking is best regarded primarily as sets of individual-cognitive (e.g. schemata, mental maps), collective-social (interactions between people) or specifically discursive (linguistic/communicative) processes (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995)” (Brown et al, 2015, p.267).

Third, there is also disagreement on when sensemaking occurs. Weick's original articulation suggests that sensemaking is triggered by equivocality, which emerges in times of crisis or puzzlement (Weick 1995). Sensemaking during crises, and during organisational change, have become important sub-streams of the sensemaking literature and have tended to reinforce this idea of sensemaking as triggered by rarer, or more extreme cues (see for example Shrivastava & Mitroff 1984, Weick 1988, Weick 1990, Gioia & Thomas 1996, Balogun & Johnson 2005, Lüscher & Lewis 2008, Weick 2010, Rouleau & Balogun 2011, Maclean et al. 2014). Others have however asserted sensemaking as an everyday process (Maitlis 2005, Rouleau 2005, Patriotta & Brown 2011, Cunliffe & Coupland 2012). The way forward for an empiricist may therefore rest in being open to sensemaking potentially being triggered by events or issues of any scale, as an impression of one's activity being disrupted is experienced subjectively. We may reasonably presume “to find explicit efforts at sensemaking whenever the current state of the world is perceived to be different from the expected state of the world” (Weick et al, 2005, p.414).

Further, a number of scholars identify opportunities to develop the sensemaking perspective by addressing aspects which they argue deserve more attention – in particular embodiment, emotion, and sociomateriality. Scholars who argue for a focus on embodiment suggest that physical, sensory experiences are underplayed (Harquail & Wilcox King 2010, Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010, Cunliffe & Coupland 2012) and must be included if we are to afford fully humanised explanations of processes. Similarly, the role of emotions in sensemaking is

considered under-developed (Bartunek, Rousseau et al. 2006, Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010, Catino & Patriotta 2013, Maitlis, Vogus et al. 2013). Studies so far have shown that emotions can trigger sensemaking, as well as hamper or enable the sensemaking process (Dougherty & Drumheller 2006, Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010).

Sociomaterial factors such as tools, settings and physical arrangements are also argued to influence sensemaking (Stigliani & Ravasi 2012, Carlile, Nicolini, Langley & Tsoukas 2013, Balogun et al. 2014). Drawing on Orlikowski (2000, 2008), scholars have shown that artefacts as wide ranging as drawings, slide presentations, lego bricks and information technologies all help to construct sense, with repeat usage institutionalising their intrinsic logics in routines (Stigliani & Ravasi 2012). Such artefacts can become associated with individual and generalised identities too, generating and reinforcing our expectations (Balogun et al. 2014). Considering SPS, a common image that may be invoked is of an older white male dressed in a conservative grey suit, holding a sheaf of papers, exemplified in the character Sir Humphrey Appleby in the British television series 'Yes Minister'. That image is made 'sensible' through our socialised interpretation of the meaning not just of the individual but the individual-in-combination-with his suit and his technology (paper).

Finally, the possibility of future-orientated sensemaking continues to be debated. Weick suggested that sensemaking about the future is fundamentally derived retrospectively: it is "not done in future tense, but rather in the *future perfect* tense" (Weick, 1969) cited in Sandberg & Tsoukas (2015, p.18). Gioia & Mehra (1996) mooted a notion of *prospective* sensemaking in the 1990s, an idea which has been built upon by others who argue that retrospective

sensemaking is increasingly unhelpful in times of rapid societal change (Stigliani & Ravasi 2012, Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015). However, prospective sensemaking has as yet not been successfully operationalised (Gioia 2006, Brown et al. 2015).

To return these theoretical criticisms and opportunities to their context, excitement about the sensemaking perspective has so far outweighed criticism (Brown et al. 2015). The field has flourished in recent years, including a burgeoning of empirical studies, articulating new constructs and specialized forms of sensemaking (Maitlis & Christianson 2014). The perceived weaknesses must however be addressed clearly by putative contributors; I therefore précis this study's position within the sensemaking perspective as my summary for this chapter.

Summary: the sensemaking stance for this study

In this chapter I have presented and discussed the sensemaking perspective. I have assessed the potential value of the perspective (why sensemaking?), its constitutive elements (what is sensemaking?), and how it interacts with other factors (what influences sensemaking?). I established that leadership is currently understood as a relational process of *sensegiving*, constructed of practices of being, talking and doing; and I located leadership practices within the sensemaking move of 'responding', and consequently as a process of enactment. I then considered some key themes of criticism surrounding sensemaking in order to address them. I now close this chapter by summarising my stance for this study, taking account of these criticisms.

I suggest that a practice-based view of sensemaking affords a theoretical frame and an array of constructs valuable to the development of new empirical and theoretical insight into the phenomenon of SPS leadership in the face of strategic public challenges. In this practice-based view, everyday activities are consequential. I start from the premise that how SPS (and other actors) as key individuals in the heart of government *make* and *give* sense every day directly influences government action in response to strategic challenges (following Kaplan 2008). This view on sensemaking inextricably involves individuals engaging in identity work, resolving ‘who am I?’ in relation to events (Weick 1995; Maitlis 2009), *and* prompts attention to the influence of interpretive structures (schemas, practices, logics), and the social order (power, legitimacy and social standing) on individual sensemaking. Moreover, I interpret sensemaking as an everyday occurrence, with SPS facing events and puzzles that need to be made ‘sensible’ frequently. I anchor my practice-based view of sensemaking in a ‘tall ontology’ (Seidl & Whittington 2014) in order to connect the micro-practices of noticing, framing and responding under examination to these macro (interpretive structures) and meso (social order) levels, and so enable full account of the indirect and direct influence of power on individual SPS sensemaking. Specifically, I locate these in a critical realist philosophy and the morphogenetic cycle of Archer (2000), which I discuss in detail in Chapter 5.

For this study, focussed on SPS leadership, I place sensemaking as a socially-situated, individual cognitive process. Like Whiteman and Cooper (2011) and Lockett et al. (2014) I see interpretation processes as internal and individual, with *sensegiving* between people connecting those individual processes. I acknowledge the recent shift of key scholars towards sensemaking as discursively co-constructed between people (Maitlis & Christianson 2014,

Brown et al. 2015), and excitement about the potential explanatory value of paying attention to issues of emotion, embodiment, and socio-materiality in quotidian sensemaking. These are important developments in a maturing field. However, as Brown et al. (2015) highlight, there remains no consensus on whether sensemaking is individual-cognitive, collective-social or discursive. I suggest therefore that studies of individual-cognitive sensemaking continue to contribute valuable new empirical knowledge and theoretical constructs to new contexts and new academic fields, as recent research demonstrates (e.g., Whiteman & Cooper 2011; Hahn, Preusse, Pinkse & Figge 2014; Molecke 2014; Bévort & Suddaby 2016).

Having established the value of a sensemaking perspective for the study of SPS leadership, and explicated my stance, I now present my research philosophy, methodology and method, which build from this chapter.

Chapter 5 Research philosophy, methodology and method

In the previous chapters, I have reviewed the scholarly context for this study by examining the literature for theory and evidence on SPS leadership in Westminster system governments, and examining the potential of the sensemaking perspective to support the generation of new knowledge on this phenomenon. This review revealed a significant gap in both empirical knowledge and theory about SPS, especially in relation to their leadership – and found that a practice-based view of sensemaking holds strong potential to support new knowledge and theory generation on SPS leadership.

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, based on my consideration of the literatures in Chapters 2 to 4, I identify my research questions. I then discuss the research philosophy and design of the study. I begin by providing an overview of critical realism, explaining my rationale for its selection as a suitable philosophical paradigm, connecting the theoretical perspective of sensemaking to the epistemological and ontological assumptions of my empirical enquiry. I then introduce ‘The Gioia Methodology’ (Gioia et al. 2013) as a set of research design principles that are both congruent with my research philosophy and established in the sensemaking perspective. Finally, I present my overall research design, and offer a reflexive account of the actual processes followed. This step deliberately reveals my underlying reasoning so that readers can evaluate my methodological choices for themselves (Ketokivi & Mantere 2010, Johnson & Duberley 2003).

Research questions

In pursuit of my aim to explore and to begin to build theory about the phenomenon of SPS leadership drawing on the knowledge and traditions of both public administration and the sensemaking perspective, I pose the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the sensemaking pathways that lead to individual SPS taking leadership in response to strategic public challenges?

A: Are patterns discernable across the steps of the pathway - noticing, framing and responding?

B: Which factors influence SPS sensemaking when taking leadership, and how?

RQ2: What, if any, are the constitutional or operational implications of these findings?

In posing these questions, my aim is to uncover how SPS leadership is accomplished, and the major influences upon it. I will then draw upon this empirical evidence to consider the implications of contemporary SPS leadership for the Westminster system's constitutional conventions (or myths), and operational practices.

Research philosophy

Too often in public administration and indeed in wider organisational research, the research philosophies underpinning published studies are not fully transparent (Walsh & Downe, 2006; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson 2012).

In this section, I therefore present and seek to justify the critical realist (CR) philosophy that guides and focuses my attention within this study. The case for a CR study of sensemaking must be made explicitly because it arguably runs counter to the constructionist trend in sensemaking research. As Nijhof and Jeurissen (2006) show, a number of sensemaking's most prominent scholars are constructivist (see for example, Weick 1995, Maitlis & Lawrence 2003, Rouleau 2005). Moreover, this study, of SPS leadership, is evidently research of the social world. Such observations might lead a researcher down the path of a socially constructed theoretical frame. Yet in this study, I adopt a CR interpretation of sensemaking. My rationale can be explained through a discussion of four key aspects of CR: its stratified ontology; CR as a rescue from relativism; its application to the social world; and its emancipatory axiology.

The essence of CR is "the belief that there is a world existing independently of our knowledge of it" (Sayer 2000, p.3) balanced with a full appreciation that such knowledge of the world is dependent upon our sense experiences. CR was first set out in 1975 by Roy Bhaskar in his seminal text, 'A Realist Theory of Science' (Bhaskar 2008). The school that has emerged since has built a CR philosophy for social science, encompassing prominent scholars such as Archer (1995, 1998, 2000), Sayer (1997, 2009), Fleetwood (2001, 2004, 2005), Wilmott (2005), and Collier (1994).

Bhaskar (2013) describes CR as a comprehensive alternative to positivism. Only a stratified ontology, he claims, enables the scientist to steer clear of the Scylla and Charybdis of empiricism and constructionism. A stratified ontology distinguishes what *exists* from what *is experienced*, crucially deposing human centrality from our ontology: rather than actors constituting phenomena, CR

argues that objects can exist independently ('intransitively') but that our knowledge of it is socially conditioned and thus changeable (or 'transitive') (Patomäki & Wight 2000, Danermark, Ekstrom & Jakobsen 2001; Howell 2012). By avoiding conflating existence and experience, we can avoid what Bhaskar (2013) terms "epistemic fallacy" (p.26). Nonetheless, knowledge does not exist separately: "the transitive is differentiated from, but not exterior to, the intransitive" (Al-Amoudi & Willmott, 2011, p.29). Moreover, by identifying strata in our ontology, or what Fleetwood (2005) describes as "modes of reality" (p.199), we can then consider the interactions between them. In CR then, existence is defined by causal power and not by sense experience. In a social context such as government, ideas such as 'the rule of law', 'rights' and 'government' itself hold causal power – but cannot be sense-experienced. Further, by placing causal power as the criterion of existence, CR confirms that the question at the heart of scientific study is 'why does x happen?' For a critical realist, it is not enough to describe what happens: we must find out how, and either imply or explicitly demand action.

Archer's (1995, 2000, 2003) morphogenesis affords a clear stratification useful to this study. Morphogenesis conveys that the shape of society is not pre-determined but takes its shape from, and is formed by, agents, through the intended and unintended consequences of their activities (Herepath 2014). The morphogenetic cycle (Archer 1995) places the practitioner as subject to a confluence of pressures from social structures, and from the interplay between social collectivities. First, the practitioner is involuntaristically placed within a set of social positions, role conceptualisations (e.g., manager, politician, mother) and cultural logics, derived from people's holding theories, beliefs and doctrines. These pressures are then mediated by interactions between the

various social groups created by these conditions, “collectivities sharing the same life chances” (Archer 1995, p.256), who are understood to be caught in a permanent battle of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic wills. Subject to both sets of pressures, individual practitioners, possessing agency, act. Their actions either reproduce the existing social order (*morphostatis*) or – through reflexivity and deliberation – they creatively alter it (*morphogenesis*) (Archer 2010). A senior public servant, then, may be a single, older, professional, Māori, woman, lawyer, from Lower Hutt, working in the Department of Justice; Archer suggests her relationships with and influencing of others are shaped by their and her perception of these multiple social positions.

Archer originally coined the phrase analytical dualism in opposition to Giddens’ structuration, which itself built from (and translated into English) Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, through which objective structure largely became structure subjectively internalized (Porpora 2013, Shilling 1997). As Willmott (1999) says of Giddens:

“...the underlying thread in his texts on structuration theory is the denial of a stratified social ontology, thereby precluding the analytical separation of structure and agency” (p.15).

The morphogenetic cycle is placed as a clarification of the conflation of agency and structure, enabling a means to distinguish between social structures and human action conceptually, and crucially temporally, so that causal influence of the one upon the other can be analysed (Archer 1996). As some scholars suggest, the morphogenetic cycle affords a stronger basis than Bourdieu’s habitus from which to explain *change* as well as continuity (DiMaggio 1997).

Archer’s idea of a cycle of human activity is similar to the cycle of sensemaking discussed in Chapter 4: practitioners are influenced by social structures and

cultures, and can have influence themselves through enactment, and in doing so contribute to the constantly evolving structures that guide human life. As such, CR and Archer's morphogenetic cycle afford a sophisticated approach to analytical dualism that enables a stratified analysis of sensemaking, and which can help reveal not just *what* is done but crucially *why*, and potentially to what probable effect. They are thus congruent with this study's formulation of sensemaking as a dynamic process influenced by multiple antecedents, and which itself holds significant potential causal power.

Second, CR sees itself as a means of rescuing science from unbounded relativism. In terms of the 'science wars', the postmodern turn with its incredulity toward metanarratives (Lyotard 1984) draws attention to the weaknesses of naive positivist science and its assumption of the existence of generalisable natural laws. Social constructionism instead forces us to consider *how* we know. Yet the logical endpoint for all postmodernists, including social constructionists, is the idea that truth is relative to each standpoint, assuming that nothing can exist independently of our own minds - or we cannot know it does. Such global relativism is criticised by critical realists and soft social constructionists, who espouse local applications of constructionism, alike (Burr 1998).

If all standpoints are equal then there is no means of selecting between them, and one is crippled into inaction. And inaction - just like action - has moral implications. Instead, CR claims objective reality is possible, and knowable (Hartwig 2015). Rather than engaging in paralysing debate, CR's assertion of a stable, stratified, ontology (see above) enables us to move beyond ontological angst and into critique. CR's asserted ontology is however its greatest weakness too. We may believe but we cannot independently know that

Bhaskar's mechanisms or Archer's structures exist; and if we rely on probability, we fall foul of Hume's classic problem of induction and risk assuming the constant conjunction of effects (Popper 1979). In acknowledgment, Al-Amoudi & Willmott (2011) suggest CR is therefore best conceived as a discourse itself, as one possible means to discursively construct 'the real'. They suggest that acknowledging this epistemological relativism:

"...paves the way to critical realist studies of sense-making that recognise the effects of the concepts employed by participants while acknowledging the dependence of their knowledge upon conditions which are not of their making... much insight may be gained by problematizing the categories used by participants and researchers... and analysing the power effects of participants categories on those practices which they are meant to describe" (Al-Amoudi & Willmott 2011, p.30-31).

Third, adopting CR also supports "disciplined transdisciplinarity" in sensemaking and wider practice studies (Whittington 2011, see also Rouleau 2013).

Epistemologically, because CR holds that there is an intransitive world independent of human knowledge, the positivist quality criteria for research - objectivity, reliability and validity - also hold. As a post-positivist paradigm however, CR recognises the complexity of the social world and the potential of social entities to change; phenomena can and must be explained in the rich, socially situated context in which they are observed. CR is not naive in its search for contextualised explanations: instead it demands reflexivity on behalf of the researcher too, as illustrated by the quotation from Al-Amoudi & Willmott (2011) above. While retaining the belief that objective knowledge is possible, CR scholars accept that our understanding of the world is mediated by "a pre-existing stock of conceptual resources... which we use to interpret, make sense of, understand what it is and take appropriate action" (Fleetwood 2005, p.199). As such, CR encourages sophisticated analyses of the social world, demanding

reflexivity and rigour in the identification of actors, structures, and the causal powers of each.

Accordingly, CR allows for the adaption of tools from other research philosophies. A number of important sensemaking studies are located in a social constructionist worldview (such as Weick 1979, 1995; Pye 2005, Cunliffe & Coupland 2012). Such literature offers a range of analytical methods that can offer insight, in adapted form, to a CR study of SPS sensemaking and leadership - such as discourse analyses, ethnography, narrative and performance analyses. For a CR scholar, these methods can offer ways to *gather* data about the social world but the *analysis* of that data is framed by an epistemology that values causality and objectivity. Fairclough (2005), for example, offers a revised CR approach to discourse analysis that challenges the assumption that organizations consist only of discourse, and addresses the method's implicit 'flat ontology' that makes no ontic distinction between agency, process and structure. A CR perspective thus offers the freedom to select methods that intend to generate theory such as grounded methods, and also the possibility of adapting post-modern methods.

Fourth, CR shares an emancipatory ambition with sensemaking. CR in social science is often described as emancipatory (Patomäki & Wight 2000, Hartwig 2009). The emancipation takes two forms. First cognitively: if x is caused by hidden generative structures, identifying and critiquing x can help to free us from it. Second and more radically, in CR emancipatory action is "...both causally presaged and logically entailed by explanatory theory... [but] it can only be effected in practice" (Bhaskar 1986, p.171). If we welcome this emancipatory potential, it is important to be reflexive ourselves: our desire for emancipation is

probably value-driven. Personal values and social contexts can have considerable influence on what we select to study, on how problems are defined, and on how we allocate causality. Critical realists should take full account of normative factors, but some of its proponents, particularly perhaps Bhaskar, have not always done so adequately (Sayer 1997).

CR's limited treatment of axiology holds epistemological traps too. For example, if our purpose as CR scholars is to unmask a (relatively) intransitive hidden reality, there is the risk of finding evidence of what we were looking for. Further, a desire for change may encourage us to overstate agency, but while human activity can hold causal power, so can structures; in the arena of government, for example, over-attribution to agents, especially 'leaders', is a constant risk. Attributing causality accurately demands both rigour and open, dialectical challenge. For all these reasons, a CR researcher must guard against being carried away by the opportunity to identify new social laws and instead be careful to articulate the limits both of perceived generative structures and of selected methods. I acknowledge my aspiration to overcome the double hurdles of scholarly quality and policy relevance (Pettigrew 2005), the risk inherent in that, and as such welcomes the epistemological rigour required by CR.

A CR theoretical frame is appropriate to this study owing to its utility in analysing the interplay between agency and structure, and so help to distinguish the pathways via which external, structural influences shape SPS leadership practices. This is further supported by CR's navigation between determinism and constructivism, which again demands attention to why phenomena take the forms they do. CR's requirement of rigour in requiring the continued pursuit of positivist quality criteria and clear acknowledgment of

researchers' normative aspirations to real-world impact, reflexively applied, are also consistent with my ambition to produce a high quality study.

I also suggest that the CR ontology and epistemology I bring with me, and the theoretical perspective (sensemaking) I am using to look, listen, and to think with, are aligned. They now need to be joined by a methodology that fits my purpose and is congruent with my worldview, to form a coherent philosophical system (Howell 2012; Richards & Morse 2012).

[Bridging research philosophy and design: the Gioia methodology](#)

As established in earlier chapters, this study focuses on a phenomenon not yet fully explicated by theory, in part owing to a shortage of empirical work. As such, an inductive, qualitative strategy is adopted as appropriate for an exploratory study of the social, cultural, and political aspects of people and organizations (Myers 2013). Instead of testing pre-defined constructs, this study uses evidence as the genesis of a conclusion (Ritchie & Lewis 2003), engaging in the work of theory building through in-depth examination of the complexity of situated SPS leadership.

To support this aspiration of inductive theory-building, my research strategy draws upon the principles expounded by 'the Gioia methodology' (Gioia et al. 2013). Here, Gioia & colleagues set out a systematic approach to qualitative, inductive research which explicitly aims to demonstrate rigour in data collection, analysis and reporting so that the resulting findings satisfy the positivist quality criteria for research - objectivity, reliability and validity. The Gioia methodology draws upon grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967) and through data

structuring and modelling (see below) offers procedures that are helpful in avoiding the pitfalls of researcher bias, insufficient contextualisation, and lack of rigour sometimes seen in grounded studies (Allan 2003, Gasson 2004, Charmaz 2006). During research design, I anticipated that difficulties in accessing SPS, given their seniority and agendas that can change rapidly in response to political events, as well as difficulties in accessing multiple data sources on each case, also augured against a full grounded theory approach for this study.

As a systematic approach aiming for rigour, the Gioia methodology is aligned to my CR stance. Gioia et al. (2013) openly state an aspiration for their method to facilitate originality in theorizing by bridging the traditional scientific method and the interpretive approach, emancipating researchers from the constraints of dominant paradigms (see also Gioia & Pitre 1990). I interpret both the emancipatory aim and the desire to reap the benefits of disciplined transdisciplinarity (Whittington 2011) as evidence of further congruence with my CR worldview.

The ontological fit of the Gioia Methodology is more nuanced. Gioia et al. (2013) frame the organisational world as socially constructed. As a critical realist, I can accept that organizational worlds, including the world of governments, are neither materially or artefactually real (Fleetwood 2005) but I reject the flat ontology asserted by social constructionism that makes no distinction between agency and structure. I see Gioia et al.'s (2013) 'knowledgeable agents' as practitioners located within a stratified reality, enabling me to analyse the dialectical interaction between them, their social structures and social group positioning. Indeed, while Weaver & Gioia (1994)

endorse structuration as a useful lens for studying organisations, emphasizing Giddens (1979, 1984) over other similar theorists, this may be owing to Giddens' heightened influence on the organisational literature at that time. In sum, not only can the Gioia Methodology be adapted to critical realism, doing so can be seen as a presaged adaptation. It is however important to note that the Gioia methodology does not articulate a fail-safe 'method'; it presents a cogent and proven framework for inductive research that fits the objectives of this study, and for which multiple relevant examples are available (see for example, Gioia & Thomas 1996, Corley & Gioia 2004, Mantere, Schildt et al. 2012).

Following the Gioia Methodology, data collection is expected to be a circling, iterative process in which semi-structured interviews form the main source of data, and in which "interview questions *must* change with the progression of the research" (Gioia et al. 2013, p.20, emphasis in original). To afford some control of this process, the study begins with a well-specified, if general, research question. A clear focus from the start is vital to avoid being overwhelmed by the volume of data generated (Eisenhardt 1989). Crucially, Gioia et al. (2013) acknowledge the semi-structured interview as the likely main method of data collection and recommend close attention to the design of the interview protocol. The protocol enables the paths of the investigation to be led by respondents, enabling evidence to emerge in a conscious and unbiased way.

In interpretive work, data analysis is interwoven with data collection, which can render it difficult to demonstrate convincingly the route between evidence and findings. To mitigate this risk, the Gioia Methodology (Gioia et al. 2013) advocates three principles. First, analyses are separated conceptually into three

levels – 1st-order, 2nd-order, and 2nd order aggregate dimensions. 1st-order analyses distil categories from data collected that adhere faithfully to respondent terminology; 2nd-order analysis requires the researcher to search for latent themes, dimensions and narrative; here, the researcher is encouraged to identify key concepts that may be new or drawn from another domain that help to explain the phenomena in hand. If possible, aggregate dimensions can also be identified. During the analysis, the researcher is expected to shift from purely inductive to abductive analysis (Alvesson and Kärreman 2007), “cycling between emergent data, themes, concepts, and dimensions and the relevant literature” (Gioia et al. 2013, p.21). Second, the three levels of analysis are mapped into a data structure, which documents the hierarchy developed between 1st order concepts (at the bottom), 2nd order themes (middle), and aggregate dimensions (top). The data structure is valuable as a product and as a process, helping to connect what’s happening at the micro-level to more abstract, macro concepts. Third, the methodology demands equal focus on capturing the informants’ experience in theoretical terms, by concentrating in particular on identifying causal relationships between the concepts; that is to say, rigorously considering the location and direction of the arrows when constructing the conceptual model.

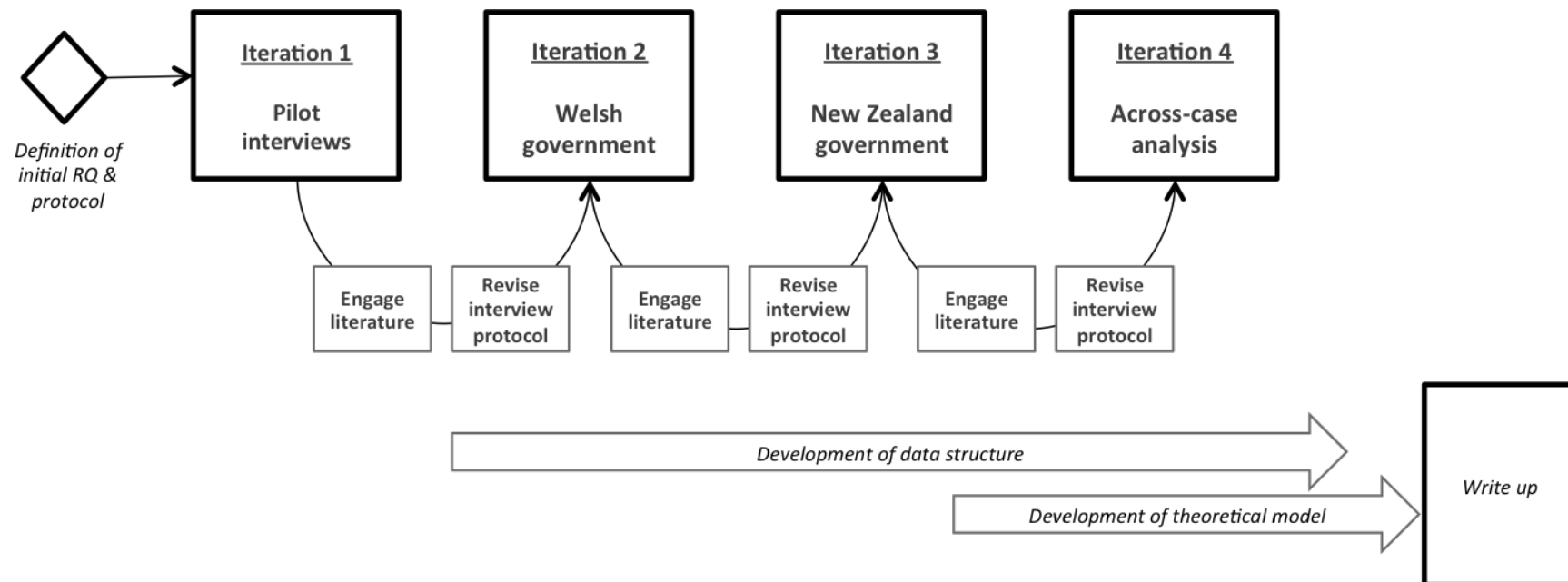
Finally, in qualitative research, “the researcher is the instrument” (Judge, Thoresen et al. 2001, p. 14), and in acknowledgement of this, Gioia et al. (2013) advocate transparency in the presentation of findings if the study is to aspire to reliability (Judge, Thoresen, Bono & Patton 2001) or dependability (Lincoln & Guba 1985). The findings should present the analytical steps taken, and enable readers to see the connection between data, emerging concepts, and the resulting model. Studies adopting this approach typically have ‘findings’

chapters that are replete with informant quotations demonstrating that their voices, not the researcher's, have been privileged (see for example Balogun & Johnson 2005 and Stigliani & Ravasi 2012). Second, to help mitigate the classic problem of induction (Hume & Beauchamp 2000), the 'method' section includes a detailed and reflexive account of the systematic approach undertaken, exposing the researcher's underlying reasoning so that readers can evaluate the methodological choices for themselves (Ketokivi & Mantere 2010). Accordingly, in the next sections of this chapter, I present a detailed account of the research design and procedure followed for this study.

Overall research design

In a qualitative study, research design "should be a reflexive process operating through every stage of a project" (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995 cited in Maxwell 2008, p.214). An effective design enables the researcher to achieve her research goals as a study develops within a congruent, valid and practical framework. The six main phases of this study, from planning through three phases of iterative data collection and analysis, to synthesis and write up are shown in Figure 5.1 overleaf. The figures in brackets indicate the number of key informants accessed in each iteration of data gathering and analysis. It should be recognised that in practice, gathering and interpreting qualitative data is iterative, and messier, than a two-dimensional schematic allows – and this study complied with that well-observed pattern (Ritchie & Lewis 2003).

Figure 5.1
Overall research design



The study comprised three episodes of fieldwork, carried out between September 2016 and April 2017. Data was gathered via loosely-structured interviews in order to collect a rich cross-sectional account. Interviews were selected as an excellent means by which to capture data that could be explored for different levels of meaning (King 2004). Interviews are also a widely-recognised research tool, and as such I anticipated would be acceptable to my target informants (rather than, for example, research diaries or observation). Comparison was enabled by the spread of interviews achieved. The analysis was both inductive and abductive, constructed of empirically-grounded findings and the development of new concepts, then refined through consideration of extant theory.

Key informants and sampling

A well-designed sampling strategy is important to producing reliable and robust results, and forms a key element in any later claim to generalisability. In this section, I define the target population for this study, and explain the sampling strategy. This aspect of my qualitative research design may sit uncomfortably for interpretivist readers, if like Denzin (2001) for example they hold that generalization is impossible. Instead, like Gioia et al. (2013) and Morgeson and Hofmann (1999), I hold that many concepts and processes are similar, even structurally equivalent across domains. I do therefore aspire to thoughtful, delineated, theoretical model generation from this interpretive study.

In line with the Gioia Methodology, the overall research strategy for this study is inductive and qualitative, involving an iterative 'constant comparison' between the data and the literature borrowed from grounded approaches (Glaser &

Strauss 1967). In sensemaking and practice-oriented studies adopting a similar approach, the sampling strategies presented are purposive, theoretical and snowball – sometimes in combination (Corley & Gioia 2004, Maitlis 2005, Jarzabkowski & Seidl 2008, Sonenshein 2009, Coleman et al. 2010). As for these studies, the sampling strategy for this research evolved.

Prior to fieldwork commencing, I developed a purposive sampling strategy, aiming for a selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton 1999). The unit of analysis is the ‘senior public servant’, defined as individuals holding permanent senior posts in the administrative arm of state or sub-state governments recognised as Westminster system governments. I chose to target SPS in two sites, to help distinguish common processes and dynamics and those generated by unique local factors. Pragmatically, access was also a factor: SPS exhibit most of the characteristics of élites identified by Moyser (2006), namely difficulties of access, being time-pressured, and an expectation of expertise on behalf of the researcher. In my professional career, I have had the privilege of working for both the New Zealand and Welsh governments at different times. I therefore selected them as my research sites hoping to capitalise on my ‘insider’ knowledge and personal networks to facilitate access.

In the Welsh Government, the target population was set as individuals within the ‘senior civil service’ (SCS), who work strategically with ministers and manage large, complex divisions and projects (Stanley n.d.). Senior civil servants in the Welsh Government hold the standardised ranks of Deputy Director (lowest), Director, Director General or Deputy Permanent Secretary, and then Permanent Secretary. The Welsh government is constituted as a

single government department, and as a result there is just one Permanent Secretary and all those in SCS positions hold significant influence. In New Zealand, the equivalent population is the senior leadership group of the Public Service. The Public Service is defined as the 29 national government Public Service Departments, with the senior leadership group being the departmental Chief Executives and tier two and three managers (State Services Commission 2015). I established purposive sampling criteria in advance to guide informant selection and to ensure that collectively those interviewed were broadly representative of the overall SPS population in Wales and New Zealand. The criteria are shown in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1
Sampling criteria – purposive sample

Homogenous factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practitioner in focus: SPS in national governments. Formal rank is taken as a measure of practitioner seniority. • Challenge: the practitioner recognises the definition of a strategic public challenge (see Appendix D), and has personal experience of responding to such a challenge that she is willing to share. The challenge lies within the domestic policy sphere, rather than foreign, defence or trade affairs.
Variation factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional context: Welsh Government, or New Zealand Government as two sites of Westminster system democratic governments • Practitioner characteristics: gender; age; length of service

My position as researcher: co-conceptualisation and reflexivity

Studying sensemaking is an active and subjective sensemaking process in itself (Allard-Poesi 2005). As the sole researcher in this qualitative study, I am both *making sense* of the findings and *giving sense* about them through my explanatory narrative and model. Aligned to many practice theorists, I regard

my key informants as knowledgeable agents who are aware and “can explain their thoughts, intentions and actions” (Gioia et al. 2013, p.17). However, as a critical realist I resist the common term ‘co-constructing’, and instead define my position as ‘co-conceptualising’; this avoids any ontological exaggeration that implies social entities might be made rather than simply conceptualised by my activity (Fleetwood 2005).

Acknowledging my position as a co-conceptualiser attracts two important methodological considerations. First, the study should privilege key informant voices (bottom-up insight) and avoid imposing extant ideas or assumptions via my own voice (top-down). In the findings narratives, I quote key informants liberally, in order to demonstrate the inductive source of the concepts generated. Further, appropriate to the research design, I engaged most deeply in the literature in the abductive phases of analysis – *after* initial concept generation, and as a means to test emergent concepts and process explanations.

Second, a co-conceptualiser must practice “disciplined reflexivity” (Weick 1999), noticing and taking account of her own influence on her workings. Central to reflexivity is critical self-evaluation of a researcher’s positionality, plus explicit acknowledgement of its potential influence on a study’s outcomes (Berger 2015). I recognize that my positionality – especially my perceived identity and social standing - has had some implications for this study in terms of access, disclosure, and interpretation. As someone who is undertaking a doctorate after 20 years in the workplace, I have a modest professional reputation, and an emerging standing as an academic researcher, which may have afforded potential key informants some comfort that I ‘get how things work’ and can

empathise with them personally and professionally. My impression is that this was a factor in accessing key informants. It was also helpful in encouraging disclosure during interviews: short statements of encouragement such as ‘oh yeah ...’, or ‘I understand what you’re saying...’ contained greater meaning for informants owing to my embodied positionality. I was perhaps also able to probe further into processes of sensemaking in the relatively short time allowed for most interviews (less than one hour) owing to my knowledge of institutional routines and practices. Beyond my abstract positionality, I was professionally acquainted with the majority of informants in Wales prior to the study, and consequently had at least some knowledge about their careers and professional practices. While this improved the frankness of our discussions, it is also important to highlight another relational dynamic at play – namely an interest on both sides in preserving an ongoing relationship (Maclean et al. 2012). The effect of my positionality is arguably also equivocal when it comes to the interpretation of data. My experience has endowed me with praxis knowledge, which can support the development of rich insights, but which is also replete with shortcuts, biases and assumptions that have enabled me to be effective in the workplace.

Further, reflexivity demands acknowledgement not just of my own impact, but also that there are multiple layers of meaning in any social situation; accordingly, researchers must make “conscious and consistent efforts to view the subject matter from different angles and avoid or strongly a priori privilege a single, favored [sic] angle and vocabulary” (Alvesson 2003, p.25). To address these concerns, I took three steps. I was conscious of the risk; whenever a concept or process that felt familiar emerged, I repeatedly checked the

evidence; and I asked my supervisory team to actively challenge my findings. Creating the data structure proved a valuable discipline in this procedure.

Ethics and confidentiality

The third pillar of my overall research design is research ethics. The main ethical risk for this study was the potential of causing harm to informants, or to their employing governments, through inappropriate disclosure of their testimony or information derived from documents they shared confidentially (Rubin & Rubin 2011; Luton 2015). The most important ethical considerations were thus those of informed consent, confidentiality, and honesty about the intended use of the data.

The informed consent process. Given the élite status of the target population, a presumption of competence was reasonable. The following verbal consent approach was therefore adopted:

- Interview request letters sent by email summarised the purpose of the interview and the ethical standards being observed;
- Once a potential participant had confirmed her willingness to be interviewed, she was sent the full Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix D), again by email;
- Hard copies of the Participant Information Sheet were taken to all interviews. At the start of each interview, the researcher prompted the participant to read the sheet if she had not done so before, and tested that she was comfortable to proceed.
- The date and time of each key informant's verbal agreement was documented after each interview.

Overall, this approach ensured each participant was prompted to consider her participation three times before the interview begun. Participants were able to withdraw consent at any time too; none chose to take up this option.

Confidentiality and data protection. As a former senior civil servant, I have been fully cognizant of the potential sensitivity of interview content. I hoped that informants would share their experiences openly given my 'insider' positionality. Such openness was to the advantage of the study, but demanded rigorous attention to confidentiality and data protection.

The informant population was generally familiar with the purpose and processes of academic research. Nonetheless, the purpose of the study, and the fact that the findings would be published both in the long form of the doctoral thesis and potentially in subsequent journal articles were highlighted. All interviews were digitally recorded, with consent sought at the start of each interview. Informants were assured that both recordings and resultant transcripts would be anonymised and stored securely (in compliance with Plymouth University's Ethics Policy and Data Protection 1998 legislation).

The research approach adopted encourages extensive quotations from interview participants in the reporting of findings. I discussed the option of an embargo on the thesis with my Director of Studies on a number of occasions; this was maintained as a possibility until the very latest stages of the writing so that concerns about breaking confidentiality did not disrupt the flow of articulating findings. In the end, we decided together that the thesis could be published after manageable editing without compromising confidentiality: to ensure anonymity, alongside the replacement of participant names with simple numerical codes (1, 2, etc.), I reviewed and removed details from quotations that could potentially lead to the identification of an individual by someone familiar, such as a colleague. Where this was required, every effort was made

to ensure the exclusion of a detail did not alter meaning, on occasion leading to a quotation being dropped in favour of a less 'risky' alternative.

Honesty. The study did not use deception, covert questioning, environmental manipulation or any other technique in contravention of the principles of open and honest interviewing. Indeed, like Whittington (2011), and Gioia et al. (2013), the approach adopted for this study values the understandings of the research subjects themselves. I disclosed the purpose of the study in writing and in conversation; moreover informants were asked to share their reflections on their own sensemaking as part of the interview approach.

Research process and methods deployed

Above, I acknowledged my positionality and the risk that my professional experience might encourage shortcuts in my own sensemaking, which could threaten rather than enhance the quality of my analysis. To demonstrate the steps I took to safeguard against this risk, I set out the research process and methods deployed in Figure 5.2 overleaf.

Figure 5.2
Conceptual illustration of analytic abstraction process

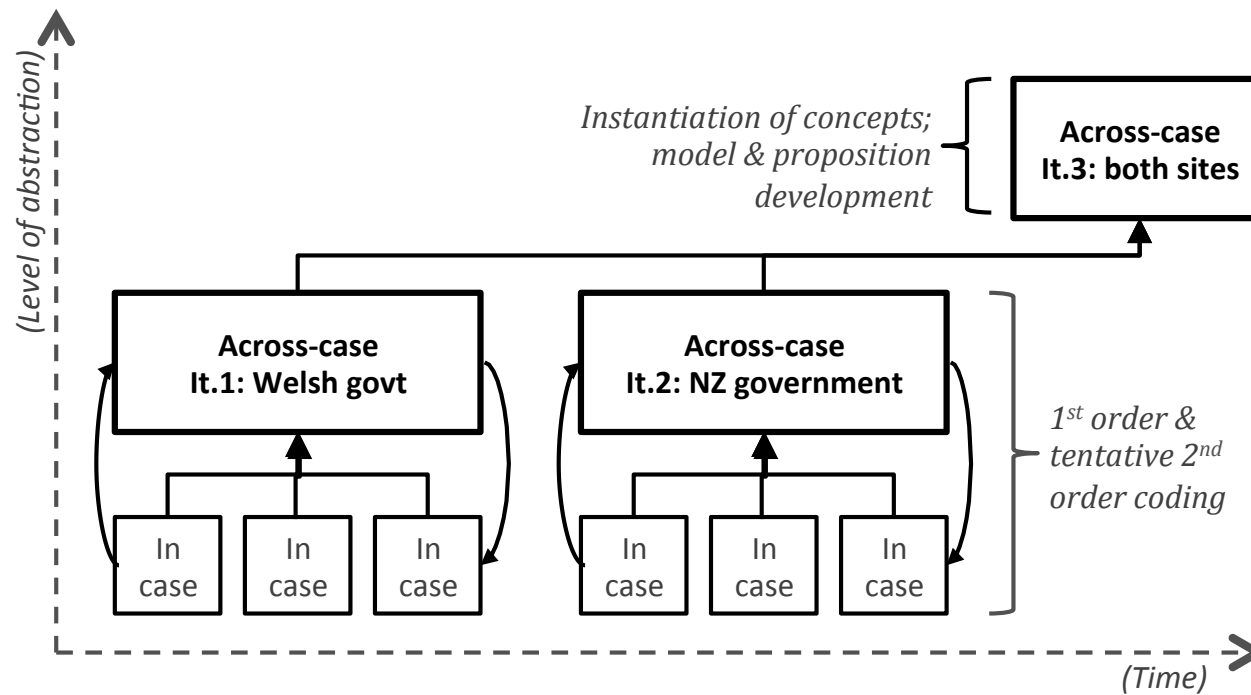


Figure 5.2 offers a conceptual illustration of the analytic abstraction process undertaken in iterations 1, 2 and 3. Iterations 1 and 2 comprised independent processes of within-case and across-case analysis for the two sites of the Welsh and New Zealand Governments respectively. Iteration 3 involved integrative analysis leading to instantiation of concepts and model development. These are discussed below, though I begin now with a discussion of the preparation and pilot stages.

Preparation

The development of my research aim and supporting questions was not a linear process. My focus, driven by my research interests and professional experience, centred on the internal, day-to-day workings of national governments; this led to an interest in, and excitement about, the potential of the practice turn to offer new illumination to the study of government. I was however aware that few scholars had to date focussed on public management's key actors, with Moore's (2013) public value theory a prominent exception².

Reading widely across the academic literature, my view on the potential contribution of this study evolved considerably. Rather than seek to test an extant theory – public value (Moore 1995, Benington & Moore 2011) – I decided to embark on building new theory. I could not find a starting point within public administration and so began to favour the strategy-as-practice perspective (see for example, (Jarzabkowski & Spee 2009, Whittington 2011) as affording a potentially appropriate theoretical framework. However, as I prepared for the

² The scholarship by Rhodes & colleagues (Rhodes 2005, 2007, 2011; Bevir & Rhodes 2010) on interpretive British governance is also pioneering in this regard, but the deep ethnographic methods deployed and interpretivist strictures deterred me from their approach for this study.

pilot interviews, and continued to read, I realised that the connected sensemaking perspective offered an array of potentially valuable concepts. It was then logical, and congruent, to identify the Gioia Methodology (Gioia et al. 2013) as the methodological framework. The research aim and questions shown at the start of this chapter reflect this position.

Practically, an important task was to develop the initial interview protocol. I chose to develop outline *a priori* instrumentation on the basis that an open mind is more sensitive to details in the data (Miles & Huberman 1994). Given the inductive task in hand, the aim was to ensure the protocol was useful, but would not ‘lead’ informants (Gioia et al. 2013). I drafted a protocol that defined three topic areas aligned to my questions, which were populated with an array of optional prompts. In later practice, as anticipated, I used just a handful of the prompts initially drafted. The interview protocol is shown at Appendix B.

In parallel, in advance of each iteration of fieldwork, I made a conscious effort to (re)familiarise with the world of my informants. For several weeks in advance, I sought out relevant news sources, looking not just for the political stories but also at web resources targeted at government professionals. Table 5.2 below highlights some top sources accessed:

Table 5.2 Sources – familiarising with the world of key informants		
	Source	Dates accessed
Iteration 1: Welsh Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil service World (civilserviceworld.com) • Guardian Public Leaders Network (www.theguardian.com/public-leaders-network) • Wales Online (www.walesonline.co.uk) • BBC News Wales (www.bbc.co.uk/news/wales) • Institute of Welsh Affairs (www.iwa.wales) • Public Policy Institute for Wales (ppiw.org.uk) 	September – November 2016

	Source	Dates accessed
Iteration 2: New Zealand Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Zealand Herald (www.nzherald.co.nz) • State Services Commission (www.ssc.govt.nz) • Australia-New Zealand School of Government (www.anzsog.edu.au) • New Zealand Public Services Association (www.psa.org.nz) • Economic and Social Research Aotearoa (esra.nz) 	February – March 2017

Pilot study

I undertook a small pilot study in early Autumn 2016. My aims were twofold: to test the interview protocol, and to practice performing a semi-structured academic research interview. I arranged two interviews with informants proximate to my target group, conducting one over Skype and one by telephone, enabling me to test these technologies as well as my approach. Both interviews were recorded, with permission, and I wrote a reflective memo directly after each interview on the process as well as on points that struck me as theoretically interesting. I transcribed the interviews and undertook first order coding, identifying and capturing informant terms and categories using nVivo software (nVivo for Mac 10). The pilot exercise revealed that my focus on eliciting information on multiple strategic challenges reduced the level of detail captured, and encouraged retrospection to recent rather than current challenges. I was also not gathering enough on informants' beliefs about their own roles. Further, connection issues during both interviews confirmed my preference for in-person over remote interviewing. I updated the interview protocol and data collection plan to address all these learning points. Finally, while it had been useful to transcribe these two interviews, the resulting muscle

pain and time taken were undesirable; one hour of interview time was taking me as a non-professional transcriber many hours to complete (Kvale 2008, p.95). I therefore updated my research budget to include professional transcription.

Iteration 1: Welsh government

The first iteration of data collection took place in Wales during November 2016. I identified potential key informants in advance by reviewing the Welsh Government's organisational chart and approached individuals directly via emails that included a short brief and participant information sheet. Crucially, this included the Permanent Secretary, whose agreement to participate proved an important signal of endorsement for some other informants.

In total, 17 interviews were completed. While my sampling strategy in advance was purposive, and I aimed for "maximum variation" (Lincoln & Guba 1985), access issues led to some pragmatism; perhaps unsurprisingly, people who knew me professionally were more inclined to respond, resulting in a slight under-representation of those working on economic development (a policy area I had less previous involvement in) and a slight over-representation of those at Director level. Table 5.3 details the iteration 1 sample. Data is not available on the gender and age split across the senior civil service in Wales; the spread shown was nonetheless broadly in line with expectations.

Table 5.3		
Informant Sample, Iteration 1 (n=17)		
Gender	No.	%
Female	6	35%
Male	11	65%
Age group (estimates)		
≤ 40	0	0%
41-50	5	29%
51-60	10	59%
60+	2	12%
Tier		
Deputy Director	5	29%
Director	9	53%
Director-General	2	12%
Permanent Secretary	1	6%
Sectors worked in		
Civil service only	10	59%
Wider public service	6	35%
Private sector	3	18%
Academia	1	6%
Third sector	2	12%

All but one of the interviews were conducted at the Welsh Government's offices in Cardiff. The outlier was conducted at the informant's home, outside of work hours. All interviews were one-to-one, and lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. All were recorded with ethical issues raised and consent to record requested, at the beginning of the interview. Generally, interviews followed the loose structure designed into the protocol (see Appendix B) while allowing informants to direct attention. I wrote up memos of varying lengths after each interview, focussing again on theoretically interesting moments – especially terms, concepts or process connections that I registered as new. This discipline afforded space for reflection and a chance to consciously evolve my research questions. For example, the notion of 'space to think and act strategically' emerged early and so I added it as a probe to the interview protocol.

I outsourced transcription of the iteration 1 interviews to an online service, after assessing the company's non-disclosure agreement. I found checking

transcriptions still took two to three hours each, but helped me to immerse in the data to explore the text and reflect on what was found (Willig 2013). I undertook transcription checking and first order coding in batches of three or four interviews at a time. This again afforded additional moments at which I could stop and reflect upon what seemed to be going on in the data.

The process of coding of the data was inspired by the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al. 2013) and grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Data collection, coding and analysis were conducted jointly in each iteration so that theorising occurred close to the field. The process was however not formulaic. 1st order coding proceeded as is widely advocated: it involved reading an interview in full, annotating it and then, using the nVivo software, generating a large volume of initial open codes, in informants' own language and without forcing grouping (Saldaña 2015). This resulted in a significant volume of codes organised only loosely into buckets of 'noticing', 'framing', 'responding', and 'antecedents'. I briefly experienced the common feeling of being overwhelmed (Auerbach & Silverstein 2003).

2nd-order coding was more complicated. Choosing what is important from the plethora of inductively-generated 1st order codes is an abductive step (Mantere & Ketokivi 2013) and I was analysing interview transcripts that were layered with meanings and open to multiple interpretations (Alvesson 2003). To help work out what was important to my research aim, I employed two techniques. First, to support my aim of building an explanatory model, I wanted to identify the dynamic interrelationships between emergent concepts, themes and dimensions not just the themes themselves (Gioia et al. 2013). Alongside the thematic across-case analysis afforded by my nVivo coding, I therefore re-

analysed each interview, organising the coding by case, in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet - which allowed me to grasp the whole of each case. I also sketched conceptual maps for each informant by hand, which again afforded a whole-case view and emphasised relationships between codes where they were clear (e.g., where an informant explicitly identified conditions or consequences). I posted the maps on the wall next to my desk as I produced the Excel analyses. I therefore had three articulations of the data produced from three separate readings available to me to test emergent second-order themes. This strategy of moving between across- and within- case comparison aided my 'intuiting', the critical reflection on and identification of themes as they are found in the accounts of multiple respondents (Ayres, Kavanaugh & Knafl 2003).

Second, it was at the stage of 2nd-order coding that I began the circling between my empirical data and extant theory that is characteristic of abductive analysis (Wodak & Fairclough 2004). This afforded the opportunity to identify concepts and processes defined elsewhere that could potentially help explain the phenomenon I was examining. For example, the concepts of strategic space (de Jong et al. 2016), complex and focused strategic schema (Nadkarni & Narayanan 2007), and the updating and doubting of sense (Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010) all initially seemed to offer potential explanatory power.

By the end of iteration 1, I was therefore able to co-conceptualise with my informants a set of key concepts and an emergent organizing framework that began to capture the dynamic relationships between those concepts. These findings, and the questions they raised, could then inform iteration 2. An important final step in iteration 1 was therefore to reflect upon and potentially update the interview protocol. Because iteration 2 was to be conducted at a

different research site, my aim was to begin again inductively and to avoid imposing my emergent understanding based on sensemaking by SPS in Wales on the sensemaking of my New Zealand informants. I therefore adopted the same interview protocol combined, as before, with the flexibility to adjust interviews based on informant responses.

Iteration 2: New Zealand Government

The second iteration of data collection took place in Wellington, New Zealand in March 2017. I applied the same purposive sampling principles established for iteration 1, with the equivalent SPS population in the New Zealand Government. Advice received in advance from local academic colleagues suggested that SPS in New Zealand are particularly difficult to access. I therefore pursued a pragmatic strategy of approaching potential informants via my network of contacts, to reduce the potentially negative issue of being less well-known. At this point, the study benefitted significantly from the support of Professor Girol Karacaoglu, Head of the Victoria School of Government in Wellington, whose introductions generated the majority of interviews. Professor Karacaoglu's support was facilitated by Professor Evan Berman, my adjunct supervisor and Director of Internationalisation at the Victoria School of Government.

The sampling strategy generated 26 in-principle acceptances, resulting in 22 firm interview dates and 21 interviews completed. Owing to Professor Karacaoglu's network, one third of the informants in the sample were Tier 1 managers - Chief Executives, Director Generals and Commissioners. The iteration 2 sample is summarised in Table 5.4 below. While the Wales sample contained only one informant formally heading an organisation, this is because the Welsh Government is structured as a single entity; as a result those holding

hierarchically lower positions in the Welsh Government hold relatively larger responsibilities than those holding equivalent titles elsewhere. The populations across iterations 1 and 2 can thus be understood as sufficiently similar to be grouped together as SPS in Westminster system governments.

Table 5.4		
Informant Sample, Iteration 2 (n=21)		
Gender	No.	%
Female	5	24%
Male	16	76%
Age group (estimates)		
≤ 40	0	0%
41-50	9	43%
51-60	8	38%
60+	4	19%
Tier		
Tier 3 (General Manager / Manager / Advisor)	6	29%
Tier 2 (Deputy CEO)	8	38%
Tier 1 (CEO)	7	33%
Sectors worked in		
Civil service only	9	43%
Wider public service	5	24%
Private sector	5	24%
Academia	3	14%
Third sector	1	5%

In advance of the iteration 2 fieldwork, I re-familiarised with the context for SPS in New Zealand by reading across current policy and political issues in the news (see Table 5.3 above), researching each informant, and speaking with local contacts. All iteration 2 interviews took place in Wellington, the majority (18) at the informant's place of work, with the remaining three occurring at the Victoria School of Government. Again, all interviews were one-to-one, and lasted between 45 and 80 minutes; and all were recorded with ethical issues raised and consent to record requested, at the beginning of the interview.

Reflexive memoing was particularly important during iteration 2. I agree with Birks, Chapman & Francis (2008) that memoing is a valuable technique that aids “in the exploration of issues with unreserved fervour yet which permit[s] acknowledgement of subjective influences and maintain[s] quality in the research process” (p.69). I found the discipline of capturing what I had noticed and why – in my case by hand, often in a coffeeshop in the half hour following an interview - proved a valuable “space and place for exploration and discovery” (Charmaz 2006, p.81–82). Memoing enhanced rigour by exposing possible biases and assumptions early – an important control on my behaviour, especially as a solo researcher. For example, it was tempting to assume the same patterns in the data in New Zealand as Wales; taking stock reflexively after each interview helped to check assumptions as they were forming.

I outsourced transcription of the iteration 2 interviews to a confidential New Zealand based service, to minimise any problems of terminology or accent. I then deliberately followed the same analytical steps followed in iteration 1 for 1st order coding (see above). Akin to memoing, the process of developing the data structure helped to enforce aspirations towards quality, as my evidence was clearly and visually exposed. I also followed the same steps established in iteration 1 for 2nd order coding, producing aggregate categories from an nVivo analysis as well as producing coding and hand-drawn conceptual maps for each case, enabling me to question the data from multiple angles. By the end of iteration 2, I was therefore able to co-conceptualise with my New Zealand informants a second set of key concepts and emergent organizing framework.

Iteration 3: Cross-case analysis and modelling

The intention of this study is to build an explanatory model for SPS leadership across Westminster system governments, rather than to produce a comparative analysis of sensemaking in Wales versus New Zealand. In practice however, three months elapsed between the two phases of data collection. I therefore chose to take advantage of this reality, by analysing the iteration 1 data (Wales) and iteration 2 data (New Zealand) independently, before then consolidating in iteration 3. This approach involved three levels and stages of analysis: within-case, across-case in each site, and then across-case for the whole study sample – as Figure 5.2 above illustrates.

In iteration 3, my focus was to instantiate the emergent concepts. The process of instantiation is the theoretical clarification of concepts through reference to concrete instances, as well as then considering how the concepts may be connected (Jaccard & Jacoby 2010). Gioia et al. (2013) also advise “a special focus on the arrows” (p.22), referring to the importance of accurately explaining the dynamic relationships between the concepts identified; only at that point can a model offer real explanatory power. Moreover, instantiation helps ensure that a model and associated propositions can be empirically tested and as such is a crucial step in successful model development. Here, instantiation involved a process of iterative cycling across the findings in iterations 1 and 2, repeatedly asking different versions of Weick et al.’s (2005) question, ‘what’s going on here?’ In this way I could gradually set aside processes generated by unique local factors, and whittle down the model to key concepts and relationships. Through comparisons, I also sharpened the theoretical articulation of concepts.

The final step was the graphical design of the model and the narrative articulation of my findings. I took inspiration from Patvardhan, Gioia & Hamilton (2015), Nag & Gioia (2012), Corley & Gioia (2004), and Gioia & Thomas (1996) on the presentation of the model. However, reflecting on the additional space afforded in a doctoral thesis as opposed to journal articles, I made the decision to first articulate my findings in narrative form in order to better connect readers to the context and stories my informants presented. I then made the decision to present the two parts of my findings that were logically emerging separately, with independent interim discussions, as a means of rendering the findings accessible for readers.

Chapter summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to present the research philosophy, design and process of the study, demonstrating both their congruence and their fit for the purpose of the study. I argued that the stratified ontology of critical realism (CR), and especially Archer's (1995, 2000, 2003) morphogenetic cycle, add philosophical depth to the sensemaking perspective by deposing human centrality from our ontology and enabling clear analysis of the interplay between structure and agency. I further argued that CR's encouragement of disciplined transdisciplinarity and its emancipatory axiology usefully encourage sophistication and reflexivity when researching the social world.

I then introduced 'The Gioia Methodology' (Gioia et al, 2013) as a set of research design principles that are both congruent with my research philosophy and established in the sensemaking perspective. The Gioia Methodology

affords a framework for qualitative, inductive research that supports theory-building and aims to meet the positivist quality criteria for research. Next, I presented my overall research design, and offered a reflexive account of the actual processes followed. This step deliberately made my 'idiosyncratic reasoning' transparent so that readers could evaluate the methodological choices made (Ketokivi & Mantere 2010). The next chapter, 6, sets the stage for the findings, which then follow in Chapters 7, 8 and 9.

Chapter 6 Introducing the findings

My task in this chapter is to briefly set the scene for the findings presented in Chapters 7, 8 and 9. I do so in two steps. First, I offer snapshots of the context surrounding the study's informants at the time fieldwork was undertaken; second, I review the strategic challenges that formed the focus for informants' discussions of their sensemaking.

Context is a crucial element of any explanation of public administration and leadership (Bryman, Stephens & a Campo 1996, Flynn 2002, Pollitt 2013). The snapshots below seek to convey at least some of the environmental complexity for SPS in the two research sites of the Welsh and New Zealand Governments; for each, I begin by surveying major socio-economic, cultural, political and policy conditions, before then discussing the specific institutional arrangements within which SPS are located. (It should be noted that owing to the Welsh Government's more complex constitutional position, the first snapshot takes slightly longer than the second).

The context for SPS in the Welsh Government

Wales is a nation of just over three million people (Office for National Statistics 2016) lying in the mountainous west of the island of Great Britain. The majority of the population lies along the more urbanised southern coast, with a further grouping along the northern coast; much of central and west Wales is rural, more sparsely populated and economically reliant on tourism and farming.

Wales is considered to be at the economic periphery of both the UK and Europe (Bristow & Munday 1997, Darby 2016, Holtham 2016).

The Welsh economy is weak by comparison to other parts of the UK. With 5% of the UK population it produces 3.4% of the value of the UK economy, a total GVA (gross value added) of £54.3 billion, equating to a workplace GVA per head of £17,573; the UK average is £24,616 (Dickens 2015, Welsh Government 2015). In May 2016, the unemployment rate in Wales was relatively low at 4.6% (Welsh Government 2016); however the economic inactivity rate sat at 23.8%, significantly above the 21.6% UK average (Office for National Statistics 2016). Overall, 23% of people in Wales are identified as living in households in relative income poverty (Welsh Government 2016) and Wales continues to see significant inequalities in areas such as education and employment, with young people collectively significantly worse off in 2015 than five years before in terms of income, employment, poverty and housing (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2015). While religion was a significant factor in twentieth century life in Wales, it has a lesser influence today. By 2011, just 57.6% of the Welsh population identified as Christian – a drop of over 14% in just ten years – while those affiliating to historically minor religions doubled to just over 10% of the population (Welsh Government 2015).

The story of Welsh history is central to understanding its political and cultural identity today. Following lengthy battles, Wales was effectively annexed by the English Crown in the thirteenth century, a fact consolidated in law in the Acts of Union of 1536 and 1543. 'Wales' as a distinct polity was afforded almost no political recognition other than a titled 'Prince of Wales' for several centuries. During this time, Welsh identity, culture and the language faced huge (English)

integrationist pressures, and were further challenged by the mass migrations heralded by the industrial revolution (Jones 1992). The rise of a Welsh national consciousness in the modern era can be traced to the second half of the nineteenth century, when radical Nonconformists began to champion Welshness and to establish new national institutions, such as a national museum, a national library and a national university (Morgan 2015).

Wales today is commonly perceived to hold a distinct cultural identity. *Yr iaith cymraeg* (the Welsh language) is perhaps the only genuinely unique symbol of Welshness and was central to Wales' cultural and political reawakening in the late nineteenth and into the twentieth century (Morgan 1981). The Welsh identity has however been argued to be a conscious political construct (Curtis 1986, Pritchard & Morgan 2003), with the *idea* of Wales strengthened in recent years as a direct result of the advent of devolved 'national' institutions (Carter 2010). Wales is often considered less class conscious than England (Osmond 2013); however, there is clear evidence of a 'them and us' divide in the widely-understood term *crachach*:

"Crachach; literally means a scab that forms on a wound, it's pronounced like the sound of a bronchitic spitting into a fire. It's a term of mild abuse used to describe the elite, the posh, the upper class" (Flynn 1999, cited in Clayton 2013, p.7).

Such social and economic structures generate professional and personal pressures for SPS in the Welsh Government. Improving the economic situation, or more indirectly responding to the complex and multiple impacts of social and economic deprivation, are priorities that run through all policy fields. In the context of the Welsh economy, SPS jobs are relatively highly paid and stable, making them comparatively more attractive. SPS in Wales, almost by default, may be considered *crachach*.

Wales' current constitutional and political structures result from the very recent devolution of government functions. The Welsh Assembly was first formed following the introduction of devolution by a UK Labour government in 1999. From the start, devolution was pronounced 'a process rather than an event' (Bradbury 2008) and the constitutional context for SPS in Wales in 2016 was already quite different to that of 2000. The story of devolution in Wales is well documented (Wyn Jones & Scully 2012, Cole & Stafford 2015); below, I précis the political and constitutional conditions facing SPS at the time of the fieldwork in Autumn 2016.

The Welsh Government, headed by the Cabinet of Ministers, is created from and is accountable to the National Assembly for Wales as the legislature. The National Assembly is a unicameral body, constituted of 60 members, 40 elected on a first-past-the-post basis from single constituencies and the remaining 20 so called 'list members' elected from five multi-constituency regions using the Additional Member System. Elections occur on a fixed timetable every four years. Politically, the Welsh Labour Party has constantly held power, either independently or in coalition. Plaid Cymru, the Welsh nationalist party, the Welsh Conservatives, Welsh Liberals, and since May 2016, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) all form minority groups. English and Welsh are recognised as official languages.

The 2016-17 Welsh Government budget was £15 billion (Welsh Government 2016). The total budget amount is decided through UK Government spending reviews; the Welsh Government then decides how to spend it. The spending power of the budget has been the primary policy tool for the Welsh Government; it is now complemented by the National Assembly's power to pass

primary legislation in an array of domestic policy areas from culture, language and heritage to environment, housing, transport, welfare, education, health and economic development and devolved taxes. These powers, like the budget, are conferred by the unitary British state, which retains sovereignty. Devolution in Wales does not mean that all public services within its geographical boundaries are overseen by the Welsh Government. Independent organisations, and those funded by and reporting to the UK Government (such as police forces, criminal and civil justice agencies, and various regulatory bodies) operate alongside the Welsh Government itself and the services it funds (such as local authorities and health services).

The policy environment for SPS in the Welsh Government is also characterised by significant ongoing flux. In Wales in November 2016, the political shock of the referendum to leave the European Union held the previous summer was resonating, with SPS trying to work out what the impact would be for their areas of responsibility. Unlike the rest of the UK, Wales had also seen elections just weeks before the referendum, in which the right-wing UK Independence Party had gained an unprecedented seven seats. The Labour Party's dominance of the Welsh political scene seemed genuinely insecure for the first time. Both events occurred against a backdrop of perceived political apathy and increasing discontent with political élites (Scully & Wyn Jones 2015, James 2016, Williams 2016). In parallel, by 2016 the Welsh Government budget was 5.8% lower in real terms than in 2010 owing to UK government spending cuts imposed as a response to the global financial crisis of 2008 and resulting recession, and cuts were expected to continue (Phillips & Simpson 2016). Serious long-term fiscal pressures were forecast because of a 'perfect storm' of reducing budgets combined with the increasing demands of Wales' ageing population (Wallace,

Mathias & Brothie 2013). In 2016, the devolution settlement was also continuing to evolve. Some legislative powers had recently awarded to the Welsh Assembly and the prospect of tax-raising powers was creating new policy possibilities, and demands, on the civil service. The new scenario of further powers being 'repatriated' following the UK's future exit from the European Union was also a subject of discussion.

SPS in the Welsh Government belong to the Welsh Government Civil Service (WGCS), the non-political administrative arm of the Welsh Government, the devolved executive government for Wales that supports Welsh Ministers to deliver their agenda. The WGCS has lines of accountability to both London and Cardiff Bay: the WGCS is part of the UK Civil Service, and its one Permanent Secretary sits on the Civil Service Board, the UK Civil Service's internal governance body. The WGCS Permanent Secretary is formally appointed by the UK Prime Minister – however on the advice of the First Minister of the Welsh Government, which in practice is the endorsement that matters. Other national public servants in Wales are accountable to Welsh Government Ministers, a convention formalised in the 2010 (Welsh Government) Civil Service Code (Nicholl 2013). A behavioural framework is articulated in the Civil Service Code and values, which draw explicitly on the British civil service tradition:

"Political neutrality, efficient administration, robust governance and sound management of public funds – the traditional core strengths of the British Civil Service - are the foundations upon which the Welsh Government Civil Service has grown" (Welsh Government 2014, para.9).

The behaviours required by the Code – integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality – are common across the UK home civil service (Welsh Government 2014, Civil Service 2015); in Wales, however, additional values have been

added that reflect the orientation of political leadership in the region – for example a commitment to the principle of sustainable development (Welsh Government 2014).

As a part of the UK Civil Service, however, the WGCS remains rooted in the cultural heritage of ‘Whitehall’. At the time of devolution, the continuance of a unified home civil service was not a foregone conclusion, but reflected political pragmatism and ‘probably’ a cultural commitment amongst key civil servants to ‘the Whitehall way’ (Cole & Stafford 2015). Indeed, Cole (2012) suggests that civil servants have played a crucial but unsung role in growing the capacity of Wales’ devolved institutions, and remain central to their operation. As a consequence, they “have a self-perception as a servant of the Welsh Assembly Government [sic] rather than a more generic professional identity as a group or a corps in public administration” (Cole 2012, p.472). In sum, the WGCS sees itself as a little bit unique. As Derek Jones, then Permanent Secretary to the Welsh Government, said in 2015:

“We all need to get used to the fact that the civil service now serves three different governments and the days of thinking solely in terms of Whitehall departments are gone for good” (Civil Service World 2015, para.4).

Wales’ small scale results in greater proximity between legislative, administrative and executive functions of the devolved government and between those bodies and external parties. Cole (2012) evokes Heclo and Wildavsky’s (1974) metaphor of village life to convey how this reduction in scale affects core Whitehall norms, revealing “...the intensity and the transparency of interactions; the ‘goldfish bowl’ breaks with key aspects of secrecy, anonymity and confidentiality that long characterised the Whitehall model” (Cole 2012, p.471).

At just under 5,000 full-time equivalent staff in total the WGCS is vastly smaller than the 45,300 equivalent staff in New Zealand's 29 public service departments (State Services Commission 2015, Welsh Government 2017). The personal challenge this presents to all civil servants in the Welsh Government was summarised by Gillian Morgan, then Permanent Secretary, in 2009: "our people tend to be taking on responsibilities at two grades below civil servants in London with the same functions, and tend to be 10 to 15 years younger" (Osmond 2009).

The context for SPS in the New Zealand Government

SPS in New Zealand are situated in socio-economic and cultural conditions that are recognisable to counterparts in Wales, but which hold distinct characteristics owing to the country's unique evolution. New Zealand is a peripheral country in the south-western Pacific ocean, consisting of two main islands. Its population of c. 4.69 million (Stats NZ 2016) lives predominantly in the top half of the North Island, with the population growing rapidly owing to government policy to attract skilled migrants, many of whom settle in the main city of Auckland (New Zealand Government 2016). The nearest neighbouring country is Australia, the south-east coast of which is a four-hour flight away.

By the end of 2016, New Zealand's economy had seen eight successive years of growth, with forecasters suggesting a moderate slowdown in 2017 (Bagrie et al. 2017). At March 2017, GDP stood at NZ\$265 billion (c. £152 billion) and GDP per capita at just over NZ\$56,000 (c. £32,100) (New Zealand Government 2016). The unemployment rate in March 2017 was 4.9% (Stats NZ 2017). New

Zealand's relative isolation is considered a key factor in what has been termed its 'productivity paradox' (McCann 2009, de Serres, Yashiro & Boulhol 2014) – a perspective that suggests that despite recent growth, the New Zealand economy is performing significantly below its potential. Nonetheless, in 2017 New Zealand was in a solid economic position, with a forecast of 3.5% growth for 2017, despite global risks (Boot 2017). Relevant to SPS, in the five years prior to 2017, state sector jobs in New Zealand had risen by 4.2% (State Services Commission 2016).

Culturally, New Zealand society is characterised by three main waves of migration. The first settlers, New Zealand Māori, now constitute 16% of the population, with 75% of the population identifying as having European (mainly British) descent, following the arrival of the British in the 18th century; there are then also 8% identifying as Pacific Islander and 12% as Asian (New Zealand Government 2016) – these last populations in particular growing significantly recently, and representing the third wave of immigration. Today, New Zealand is seen as largely multi-cultural, and welcoming of all faiths (Centre for Applied Cross-Cultural Research 2012). As elsewhere in the developed world, however, secularism is on the rise, moderated by immigration by communities such as Christian Pacific Islanders (Stenhouse 2017). Concerns about widening economic and social inequality are also increasing, with rising housing costs a key driver (Wilkinson & Jeram 2016, Barber 2017).

New Zealand's constitution is founded on the Treaty of Waitangi, agreed between Māori and the British Crown in 1840. The treaty afforded the British the right to govern New Zealand, respecting Māori land and resource rights and designating them equal status as British subjects (Orange 2015). The treaty is

most evident in the treaty settlement process and policies established since 1992, but it is not incorporated into New Zealand's domestic laws – a 'confusion' that forms one of the major arguments underpinning recent calls for a written constitution (Palmer 2008, Palmer & Butler 2016). New Zealand was granted dominion status within the British Empire in 1907; in 1947 it gained full sovereignty. Today, it is formally a constitutional monarchy, with the Queen playing a titular role only, curbed by convention.

New Zealand is a unitary state, characterised by universal suffrage and parliamentary representative democracy. Elections are held frequently by comparison with other democracies - every three years, on a fixed-term cycle - with members elected to (usually) 120 seats in one chamber, the House of Representatives. Like the Welsh Assembly, the New Zealand Parliament is unicameral, with no upper house or senate. Since 1996, representatives have been elected via mixed member proportional representation (MMP), resulting in coalition or minority governments becoming a norm (Duncan 2015). Māori, English and New Zealand Sign Language are all official languages.

At the time of the fieldwork in March 2017, the ongoing tenure of the right-of-centre National Party as the lead partner in coalition governments since 2008, as well as the party's consistent poll ratings, had generated a position of stable government. The long-serving Prime Minister, John Key, had resigned at the end of 2016, but while this was a surprise to many, the handover to his equally long-serving deputy, Bill English, was smooth. The next national elections - which have since seen the surprise return of a Labour Party government - were in prospect, due in September or October that year, but were not yet a regular topic of conversation.

Proportional representation continues to be credited with improving trust in government in New Zealand, and giving smaller parties greater voice in policymaking (Banducci, Donovan & Karp 1999, Turei 2017). There are eight parties in total in the House of Representatives – the National, Labour, Green, NZ First, Māori, United Future, and ACT parties. Day to day, the executive branch, the New Zealand Government, is led by the Cabinet, which comprises the most senior government ministers; during the period of this study, there were 19 members, with 5 further ministers sitting outside Cabinet (DPMC 2017).

Three interconnected policy themes are common to SPS across all New Zealand public service departments. First, the economic liberalism introduced in the reforms of the mid 1980s, reducing regulation, subsidies and trade barriers, has settled into what has, both approvingly and critically, been termed a ‘neoliberal consensus’ supporting an open market economy (Hackell 2013, Hehir 2017). One practical manifestation of the influence of this paradigm for SPS is the prominent role played by the New Zealand Productivity Commission whose inquiries apply a productivity perspective rooted in economics to fields as varied as housing, regulation, social services and public services themselves (New Zealand Productivity Commission n.d.). Second, New Zealand is widely regarded as one of the foremost proponents of New Public Management (NPM), based on its reforms of the 1980s and 1990s (Hood 1990, Aberbach & Christensen 2001, Boston & Gill 2011). NPM reforms in New Zealand were wide-ranging, and included preferences for the private sector, separating policy from operations, decentralisation and competition (Boston, Martin, Pallet & Walsh 1996). Crucially for SPS, NPM reformers also introduced a split in political and managerial roles, with ministers politically responsible for outcomes and departmental chief executives contractually responsible for outputs

(Halligan 2003). While New Zealand has drawn back from some NPM reforms, for example by encouraging collaboration to overcome institutional fragmentation, there is strong evidence that many vestiges of NPM remain (Chapman & Duncan 2007, Lodge & Gill 2011, Christensen 2012). Third, the National Party government made continued public service reform a central theme of its agenda (Wallace et al. 2013). The 'Better Public Services' programme, into its second phase during this study, set specific measurable results to be achieved for social outcomes that cut across departmental portfolios, thus aiming to drive service integration and further collaboration (see, State Services Commission 2017).

The national civil service in New Zealand encompasses 29 public service departments, responsible for portfolios from defence and foreign affairs, to health, justice, Māori development, and primary industries. The three most powerful departments, together called the Central Agencies, are the Treasury, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the State Services Commission (The Treasury 2013). The cohort of SPS in focus in this study is the senior leadership across those 29 departments, comprising the top three tiers of leaders (State Services Commission 2015). As of 2015, there were 968 SPS (top 3 tiers), of which 198 were tiers 1-2. Women and ethnic minorities were proportionately under-represented in these leadership tiers, compared to the overall public service (State Services Commission 2015). Salaries for top tier leaders were lower than for private sector counterparts.

A key feature of the New Zealand system is the presence of a State Services Commissioner who is managerially responsible for the state sector, a role that includes appointing and performance managing the tier 1 leaders of public

service departments, as their legal employer. Reflecting the New Public Management heritage in New Zealand, since 1998 these tier 1 leaders are called ‘chief executives’, and are engaged for five-year contracts, with performance reviewed every year (Boston 1992). Scott (2016) however argues that the focus on short-term results that typified the early years of this reform is today “balanced with stewardship obligations for long-term capability and collective impact” (p.1). The Commission is independent, though the Commissioner individually reports to a Minister of State Services. Historically, the State Services Commission succeeded the earlier Public Services Commission, which held the task of protecting the political neutrality of the public service (State Services Commission 2015). Today, that mission manifests in a code of conduct and political neutrality guidance for public servants (State Services Commission 2010a, 2010b) as well as shorter-term initiatives on integrity. The principles contained in these documents – fairness, impartiality, responsibility, and trustworthiness – mirror the behaviours promoted by the UK civil service code (discussed above).

The small scale of New Zealand, and especially the capital Wellington, means that SPS in New Zealand, like their Welsh counterparts, sit within a tight web of relationships – reflected in the pithy description of Wellington as “a village with skyscrapers” (Norman 2003, p.9). The Kaikoura earthquake in November 2017 however shook the village. During the time of this study, a number of government departments were as a result of the earthquake based in temporary offices, while their home buildings were repaired or new accommodation found. There was also wider uncertainty about the resilience of Wellington’s overall infrastructure to future events (Deloitte 2017).

Strategic public challenges discussed by SPS informants

In interviews, SPS informants discussed in detail one or two strategic public challenges they were currently facing or had faced recently (within the last 2-3 years). The definition below was provided both in advance (see Appendix D) and on the day:

Strategic public challenges are problem situations generated by changes in the external environment that directly and significantly impact (or are expected to impact) a large number of people – and in which government is expected to intervene, and will be held accountable.

They typically bear characteristics of wicked problems: they are complex and interconnected, and there is both incomplete information and divergence in value judgements on what the problem is and on what positive action might constitute.

Informants were asked to talk through one or two current or recent case examples. Specifically they were guided to discuss how they noticed the challenge (noticing), what it was (framing), and their response to it (responding).

The strategic public challenges that SPS discussed in interview covered a wide array of domestic policy areas, services and populations. My commitment to confidentiality prevents detailing each challenge, as it would enable readers to identify informants. However, in overview, the challenges ranged from health and social outcomes, to cultural services, economic development and sustainability, as well as cross-cutting questions of infrastructure, digitalisation, and institutional reforms considered vital to future governance. Together they represent a wide array of domestic challenges faced by developed Westminster system governments. A final note: one informant discussed a genuine crisis

situation; I set that data aside for this study, to retain consistent focus on broadly-defined everyday situations and challenges that engender SPS leadership.

Chapter summary

In this chapter I have introduced the findings by offering contextual snapshots of the research sites of the Welsh and New Zealand governments between October 2016 and March 2017. These illustrate some of the institutional similarities for SPS in both countries, who all work in Westminster system governments to unicameral parliamentary bodies, that each represent relatively small populations. Differences were highlighted too, such as the more limited array of domestic policy responsibilities devolved to the Welsh Government, as well as the contrasting economic and fiscal positions of Wales and New Zealand in 2016-17. I then outlined the nature of the strategic challenges upon which discussions of individual SPS sensemaking were based in interview, which all conformed to the definition-in-use of strategic public challenges.

In the next three chapters I present the resulting findings. In Chapters 7 and 8, I tell the story of the two key modes of SPS sensemaking and leadership uncovered in narrative style, through which I aim to convey a rich sense of the individual human sensemaking processes that accomplish SPS leadership. In Chapter 9, I turn to the task of constructing a process model of SPS sensemaking. Inspired by the Gioia Methodology (Corley & Gioia 2004, Nag & Gioia 2012, Gioia et al. 2013), I develop an inductive model with the potential to afford testable explanations. I concentrate in particular on defining the new

concepts offered by this study and I extract and specify the relationships between these concepts that form sensemaking pathways, presenting the model graphically.

Chapter 7 Findings: Mode A sensemaking and agenda leadership

Having set the stage for my findings in Chapter 6, I now move to their detailed presentation. In the next two chapters, 7 and 8, I present narrative accounts of my findings, through which I aim to convey a rich sense of the individual sensemaking of senior public servants when they take leadership. The construction of the integrative process model that flows from the data follows in my final findings chapter (Chapter 9).

Before presenting these findings, it is important to acknowledge that they derive from the majority of informant cases analysed, but not all. The practices SPS deploy in Modes A and B are a good fit for descriptions of leadership-in-government in the literature (Van Wart 2012, Orazi et al. 2013). t'Hart's (2014) definition is apposite: leadership-in-government embraces the full range of activities engaged in by post-holders within public organisations to influence others' actions, values and beliefs. However the practices found in a small number of cases did not conform to leadership as so defined. Instead, rather than these SPS seeking to influence others, informants in these cases selected practices oriented to enabling others as leaders. These informants were typically lower-tier SPS, and/or explicitly designated as 'advisors'. Cycling back into the literature, I resolved at this stage that it would be more theoretically interesting (and manageable) to focus on modes A and B in detail, and to set aside these other cases for future study. The fact that not all SPS conformed to modes A and B nonetheless remains an important finding for this study,

demonstrating that leadership is not the only response available to SPS in response to strategic public challenges.

The findings on Modes A and agenda leadership, and Mode B and steward leadership, are presented separately in Chapters 7 and 8 respectively. For each, I offer a narrative account and an interim discussion, as I lay the ground for the construction of the process model in Chapter 9 and integrative discussion in Chapter 10. In this way, I hope to connect readers to the situated experiences conveyed to me by informants before concentrating on the work of conceptualisation and theory building. So, to render each sensemaking mode clear and understandable to readers, I present them in the form of a Weberian 'ideal type' narrative, deliberately constructed to accentuate the typical phenomena and processes discovered into a unified analytical construct (Coser 1971, Kasper-Fuehrer & Ashkanasy 2003, Ugyel 2014). Ideal types are not simply descriptions, but are tools for causal explanation. They are drawn directly from empirical research but of course via a human researcher, inevitably involving selectivity and interpretation as to the elements that are theoretically interesting:

"An ideal-type is in effect a theorist's interpretation of the agents' interpretation of experience. It therefore involves selectivity at the theoretical level, just as interpretation of experience by agents involves selectivity at the existential level" (Aronovitch 2012, p.365)

The ideal-types presented as Modes A and B are directly supported by my empirical data from both New Zealand and Wales as the two research sites, and as such are concrete historical individual ideal-types (Ugyel 2014).

Constructing ideal-types is of course not value-free. Here, the findings are informed by my (critical realist) emancipatory axiology, which underpins my aim

to offer fresh insights on SPS leadership and the structural conditions that shape it; like Aronovitch (2012), my hope is that the study equips my agents with a new awareness of the options they face.

Before I proceed, it is useful to explain the conventions in use in the ideal-type narratives. First, I use the name 'Sian' to represent the individual SPS. I do so as part of my commitment to maintaining the anonymity of the study's informants. As I will show, SPS navigate contested waters, and many were wary of exposing their individual sensemaking and practices to academic scrutiny. My normative decision to adopt the feminine personal pronoun throughout this thesis, explained in Chapter 1, supports this aim too, obscuring informants' genders. I also refer to 'the minister' in the singular because in the main informants did so too, but not always. Ministers, like my informants, were predominantly male but in these findings, all are female. Second, I do not distinguish informants by research site (i.e., New Zealand Government or Welsh Government). This again assists in disguising informant identity. Importantly, the modes set out below are present in both research sites, except where I explicitly highlight differences. Finally, the numbers in brackets placed after each citation – e.g., (1) – are randomised unique identifiers of informants. I now turn to the narrative accounts of SPS' individual sensemaking when they take leadership.

Ideal-type narrative account: Mode A and agenda leadership

The condition that triggers the Mode A sensemaking process is **politically-intense cuing**. For Sian as a senior public servant, this cuing is double-layered.

She is prompted to pay attention to a challenge because of a shift in the tempo or volume of concerns being raised outside government, such as reports of stretched resources in frontline services which she may hear about through her networks with public service delivery organisations (e.g., hospitals, schools, local authorities) or public frustrations aired via the media. Increasing intensity is conveyed through language such as ‘urgent’ (9), ‘building up a head of steam’ (10), which generates ‘a lot of noise from stakeholders, and the public’ (7). While there may be strong rational, analytical reasons to pay attention to a challenge, SPS like Sian report facing so much competition for their attention that they respond to where the noise is coming from - a dynamic reinforced and made more volatile by elected ministers wanting to be responsive to public concerns, as this example illustrates:

...what it does, it starts to raise itself up the public profile. So to some extent government responds to what the public notice? And what's happening? So we may see trends and we may be thinking about them but it tends to become an absolute priority as the public push... (9)

For Sian, while politically-intense cues initially take the form of raised voices outside government, the level of intensity of the cues she personally experiences is influenced by anticipated and actual ministerial pressure. Highly intense political cues sometimes take the form of a minister issuing an explicit demand to her SPS to ‘sort it [the challenge] out’ (16); more often Sian describes a collective noticing experience, implying it is shared by many colleagues:

I think for a lot of us that have been in this game for quite a long time it felt like, you know, a very startling refreshment of the public policy challenge (13)

... it was almost like the tipping point. It highlighted the issue (33)

While typically not as intense as political cues springing from outside government, Sian also faces pro-active pressure from the minister to attend to her particular priorities. Typically, the commitments with which the minister is publicly associated receive highest priority from her, and she passes this pressure on to Sian: *'the minister... remains red hot on this'* (24). Crucially, as well as triggering SPS and ministerial attention, politically intense cues increase the pressure for shorter-term action: in a context where multiple challenges and voices are competing for government attention, when a challenge reaches sufficient intensity to cue noticing, demands to act are equally intense:

...it was a very messy situation where there was a demand ... 'What can we do quickly? What are some short-term fixes?' (19)

It was an emotional political reaction... It was just 'something must be done' sort of thing (29)

In the context of a politically-intense cue, Sian typically feels she has **unequivocal direction** (or unequivocal enough) from her minister: the minister has been sufficiently clear about how she wants Sian – and the department/team she represents - to respond. Sian frames the minister's direction as unequivocal especially when a public commitment has been made (in a manifesto, speech, or other government publication); Sian knows the minister will want to report positively on public commitments in later scrutiny:

So where is the minister on this? Well, clearly it's a manifesto commitment, hugely supportive, but is just expecting us to get on with it really... [She] is regularly asked about this in plenary or questions, or we had some debates, but as you would expect, she knows her commitment, she's been briefed - we've said when we will do it by, we've set it out (9)

Sian interprets ministerial direction as unequivocal when their framings are broadly congruent – that is to say, when she and the minister frame the challenge and proposed response in broadly the same way. Building up empathy for ministers in order to anticipate their preferences is highly valued in Westminster systems civil services (Richards & Smith 2000). Sian is therefore often able draw upon an understanding developed over time of her minister's preferences which affords a plausible proxy for explicit detailed direction, as shown here:

Sometimes she'd say, "Well, can you give me a two-page note on it?" or, "yeah, that's fine," ...But as I said earlier, once I'd done that a few times, I got a really good sense that most of the time I could judge that for myself, and she was very willing just to let us get on with it (19)

Sian's framing of unequivocal direction from the minister primes her to frame the challenge in terms of **delivering the agenda set by the minister** as the strategic response. This in turn reduces attention in her framing towards exploring the nature of the challenge itself; Sian's framing in Mode A sensemaking emphasizes the shape of the preferred solution – such as, redesigning current services (24,25,31,33) or setting up a new organisation (16) – rather than examining the problem. Specifically, Sian frames the locus of the challenge as lying within the public service delivery system – the array of organisations tasked or contracted to provide publicly-funded services. A delivery locus is revealed in framings that concentrate on operationalizing the system (24), being interventionist in the system (29, 33), and the state of readiness of delivery partners (12) such as councils, health and education services. By framing the locus of the challenge in this way, Sian's responding is further primed towards implementing change, typically in terms of in some way

reforming or improving the current delivery system. Further, owing to the political intensity of the cue, there is an emphasis on delivering change in the short to medium term, as the minister seeks to demonstrate progress publicly; when the level of public concern mounts, *‘the public and scrutiny process won’t allow for there just to be months of silence’* (36).

When Sian experiences congruence between her framing and the minister’s, the framing also conforms to, and reinforces, key tenets of her identity. In Mode A, identity emerges in two related forms: role conception, and professional mission. First, delivering the minister’s agenda sits comfortably within her conception of the role of a senior public servant. Sian’s **role conception** is her preferred interpretation of her role as a senior public servant – shown in Chapter 2 to be both subjective and contested. In Mode A, Sian’s role conception emphasises the key Westminster conventions of ministerial responsibility, and ministers being served by a professional, non-partisan service that advises on, but particularly implements, ministers’ decisions:

I think the role of government is to translate the democratically elected representatives, to translate their policy wishes, mandate, into action. Simple (25)

Free and frank advice but always understanding that you are not elected officials, it is the politicians who are elected, and in the end they make the decision... And even in the end if their decision you disagree with, as a public servant you are committed to implementing it. And once a decision's made, you follow through and you don't actually talk against it (33)

These quotations show that in Mode A, Sian’s role conception places her as a subservient agent to her ministerial principal. She may offer counsel, as reflected for example in the traditional New Zealand public service refrain ‘free and frank advice’ but the main emphasis in her role conception is on accepting

and implementing ministerial decisions – even to the extent of not criticising a decision once it is made.

Sian's role conception in Mode A, like her framing, also foregrounds responsibilities associated with managing. In the data, this managerial dimension is demonstrated through emphasis of her role in managing the organisation or team (7, 16), and especially on managing the agenda in hand (25, 33), and as illustrated here: *'so for me it's to kick the work off, make sure the timetable and the approach is right'* (9).

When Sian's framing is congruent with her minister's, it is additionally aligned to her sense of **professional mission**. Sian typically sees herself as bringing professional expertise – as a health service manager, an economist, or technology specialist for example - to the role and the challenge in hand. Her professional expertise is often gathered from experience outside central government, but not always. So, alongside a role conception that emphasizes delivery, Sian's sensemaking can also be primed and edited by her professional identity. The norms and practices central to professions are valued for the skills and knowledge they enable; they however create professional blinkers too, focussing the SPS' attention towards events and phenomena valuable in that profession. This dynamic is illustrated by a reflexive comment from one 'Sian', on SPS trained as economists: *'...as an economist, the evidence is right. Economists are arrogant sorts - we are! There's a selection bias'* (10).

Her sense of professional identity, combined with her delivery-orientated SPS role conception, primes Sian to frame her own agency as bound to the task of implementation of the minister's agenda. Typically, she emphasises her expertise as technical and as complementary to the minister(s) she works for.

Sian describes acting independently of her minister, deploying her own professional standing, but always consciously in support of the minister's goals:

So [minister name] let's say wants to do something about 'innovation', to improve the way in which we support it... It seems to me, we now need to give her a few, you know, '20 ways in which you could improve innovation', rather than wait for her to tell us how she wants to improve innovation... you know, they need us to help them shape that thinking (12)

and...

... Although a bureaucrat, I seem to have managed to get myself in the 'if I speak, people see me as speaking reasonably, sensibly on issues in a reasonably normal kind of a manner', rather than only being there defending ministers. Even though I haven't lost that role either (31)

Sian's sensemaking is further primed by the **dominant logics of reform** in her government. These logics are interwoven with values and knowledge structures about the main approaches to change in the public sphere, and process preferences in terms of how to achieve it. In New Zealand, the dominant logics to emerge in this data are around systems thinking, being outcome focussed, and the new notion of 'stewardship'. In Wales, they are austerity (coping with reduced government funding at the same time as increased demand), collaboration, and the opportunity of devolution. In the New Zealand Government, the logic of stewardship is pivotal to Mode B sensemaking and is discussed in detail in Chapter 8. In both A and B modes of sensemaking in New Zealand, Sian's framing of the strategic challenge in hand and her responses are influenced by the dominant logics of systems thinking and outcome focus. 'Systems thinking' is reflected in repeated use of terms such as 'systems' and 'complexity', and is suggested by one expert to reflect a '*sense of community; increasingly wanting much more joined up government*' (30). Systems thinking however seems an inchoate logic with normative underpinnings: thinking in

'system' terms, and delivering a 'system' are implied as desirable but it is not always clear what implications such logics hold in practice - as one informant reflected, referring to an exercise to develop principles for the future reform of the state sector:

The kinds of statement that we got to agree... were things like, "we'll move from sectors to systems". What does that mean? ...So where we've got to is, we've fleshed out all of those statement[s] and we've started to make them more concrete... (6)

Similarly, the logic 'outcome focus' reflects a broad desire to make sure that government interventions have the intended positive effect on individual citizens, society and the environment. The logic of outcome focus can thus drive systems thinking (30), and it is also interwoven with preference for future orientation:

[And I said], "Fine, look it's not me talking, it's the future talking at you. I'm just channelling. All right?" (33)

and....

...the future is changing so exponentially and fast. We need to look forward and imagine, and ask a different set of questions, in order to try to cope with that change (3)

In the Welsh Government cases, Sian's sensemaking is primed by the dominant logics of austerity, collaboration, and devolution. At the time of this study, austerity is a pervasive knowledge structure, described succinctly by one informant as '*demand is going up, the cost pressure is going up, expectations are going up, and there's a finite budget*' (25). It primes Sian to focus on doing '*more within the resources that we have*' (31), often through some form of service reorganisation. The logic of austerity springs from year-on-year

reductions to government budgets in Wales and the wider United Kingdom, which began after the global financial crisis of 2008 and at the time of the study in 2016 were expected to continue for the foreseeable future.

The knowledge structure of austerity is connected to a process preference for collaboration, though the preference for collaboration across public services in Wales actually predates the onset of austerity (see for example, Welsh Assembly Government 2006). The collaboration preference is demonstrated not only in repeat use of the term itself but also in the many partnership and consultation processes discussed by Sian – boards, taskforces, steering groups, engagement events. It also embraces ideas of public services joining up around citizens' needs, and of a renewed drive for coordinated policy-making within the Welsh Government itself:

We are saying: you remain [partners] but can you come together to think how better your services could be were you to collaborate more, including with [key delivery partners] (25)

and....

Try and encourage some working together more... working across Welsh government is... is quite a challenge for a number of people... I think, because they'll be very used to those, you know, single silo links to ministers (12)

Intertwined with the austerity knowledge structure and a process preference for collaboration, Sian is also influenced in Wales by a logic of devolution. This logic asserts an idea of the relative advantage for Wales of being a small country, and of benefiting from a government workforce that identifies with a strong public service ethos intertwined with their Welsh identity – and therefore a country in which collaboration should be effective:

... it is one of our areas of comparative advantage, I think, is [being] a small government service - most of the people work here, live in Wales, have Welsh roots, have got an understanding of the country, potential strength in terms of their identification with the work that they are doing (13)

An emergent aspect of the logic of devolution is also that devolution itself is a process, attracting a growing range of tools to Welsh government policymakers – specifically at the time of this study, additional legislative and taxation powers. In this data however, the logic of devolution-as-a-process is present but not quite as influential on Sian’s sensemaking as the logic of devolution enabling Wales to take advantage of its size and distinct ethos.

So, in Mode A sensemaking, how Sian responds is framed and edited by all these factors: she is triggered to pay attention to the strategic challenge by politically-intense cuing, both from outside government and from her minister; Sian’s minister then provides direction which Sian frames as unequivocal, affording Sian sufficient steer on what the minister wants; typically this also primes an emphasis on short to medium term delivery in Sian’s framing, in order to meet external expectations and the minister’s need to report effective progress within the political cycle. Sian’s own role conception, her sense of professional mission, and the prevalent dominant logics of reform in her government all reinforce her emphasis on delivery in her responding, and inform the character of that responding.

Finally, in Mode A sensemaking, Sian’s individual responding comprises a cluster of **leadership practices emphasizing delivering the minister’s agenda**: leading and designing a strategic response; externally, being the face of the agenda for stakeholders; internally, challenging one’s own organisation to change; and, delivery-focussed reporting to ministers. Leading and designing a

strategic response captures Sian's practices of translating the ministerial direction received into a deliverable agenda, and then investing her personal influence, skills and time into driving delivery of the agenda. She may not do this alone, but her formal seniority means she takes responsibility for both. The extract below affords an example, in which Sian describes designing and leading one innovation:

My reaction to the situation was that we needed to codify what we wanted to do but not be prescriptive... My role was primarily one of driving the system... and help[ing] keep the momentum actually going (25)

Sian is also the face of the agenda for external stakeholders, representing and promoting the agenda on behalf of the government across the wider delivery system. This involves an array of influencing practices, from chairing and attending boards and stakeholder groups, to conference speeches, to consultation events, and building alliances through one-to-one meetings and conversations. Sian's approach varies according to the formal institutional arrangements of the arenas within which she is operating, and her personal relationships; leading the agenda with stakeholders is described variably as '*cajoling, supporting*' (31), '*listening and encouraging*' (12), as well as '*being accessible and available*' (19). The connecting aim is to align stakeholders to the government's agenda. Typically, Sian's preference in Mode A is to persuade stakeholders; however, her strategic response may also have a harder edge when directed by her minister. The example below illustrates this dilemma:

So, that's one of my dilemmas at the moment, is to have a system that needs direction - and there's ultimately going to be enforcement - but wanting people to have come to their conclusion early for the right reasons and find the

solutions for themselves locally, rather than simply wait for the government to be intervening for the wrong reasons. So that's one of my dilemmas (31)

Thus the underlying purpose of Sian's practices as the face of an agenda is to seek to persuade external stakeholders to act in accordance with the government's chosen response to the strategic challenge faced - for example, by integrating services. Her stated preference for persuasion is however underpinned by the option to use government's regulatory tools, such as legislation or the allocation of funding, to try to force compliance; an option to which stakeholders are almost certainly alert.

In Mode A sensemaking, Sian also leads the delivery of the government agenda within her own department. This involves routine practices such as overseeing the development of strategy documents and action plans, and managing her team, but also **challenging her own organisation to change**, by confronting organisational norms and patterns of thinking. In some instances, Sian describes her challenging her department in the course of day to day work; in one example, she characterises her government as 'a *sausage factory*' [mechanically churning out fat, low quality product] when it comes to producing documents and describes her ongoing efforts to shift the organisational norm towards producing shorter papers tailored for the target audience (25). In other instances, especially when Sian holds a very senior position, her challenging of routines may form part of a major reorganisation process:

I dramatically changed the department. I had a mandate to do that. I gutted my executive team. So of the 12 positions, only two retained their role... So the first year has been purely internal because I've actually had to rebuild my senior team... I'm not allowing them to be comfortable (33)

The fourth leadership practice in Mode A sensemaking is **delivery-focussed advice and reporting to ministers**. Here, Sian's influencing of ministers concerning the strategic challenge are typically delimited by the ministerial direction that has been given. The emphasis is on the matter-in-hand of the agenda to be delivered, as this example illustrates:

I spend a lot of time with ministers, and reassuring them... Talking through the budgets, talking through why we're doing this, we've had several sessions on that (7)

As an SPS, Sian reports to her minister in person as well as in writing, and there is two-way exchange about the agenda, emerging issues and handling. At times, Sian's advice to her minister may involve robust exchanges, but fundamentally in Mode A the ministerial direction is accepted. In the example below, Sian describes an advisory exchange with her minister, who is championing a potentially radical new approach:

It's got an interesting concept to it, but I don't think it's the answer... [and] that became the ethos of what this was, at least in the minister's view... It was interesting trying to steer that in a different direction and I don't think we've fully succeeded yet, but the real challenge to us back [from the minister] was "Okay wise guy, give me an alternative because that's my idea." ... I do think there is something in the concept. Nobody in the world's done anything like this. It's got to be a system response... And when you think about it, that's quite profound and quite challenging because it's quite different... (24)

This example illustrates how Mode A sensemaking is bounded by Sian's role conception, as well as by a dominant logic: here, Sian accepts the minister's framing of the overall aim ('I do think there is something in the concept'), but shows that she believes she has a legitimate basis from which she can hold her own opinion ('I don't think it's the answer') and can appropriately influence the minister's view on how to implement it ('it was interesting trying to steer that in a

different direction'). She then focuses her discussion on her emerging thoughts about implementation, adding her own framing of the challenge as a 'systems' problem.

A key purpose of ministerial conversations for Sian is to test her emerging ideas about implementation, and to get the minister's endorsement, or 'cover' for actions she takes independently but in support of the minister's goals (23, 25).

When Sian's and the minister's thinking are aligned these can be straightforward exchanges (9, 19). Sometimes however Sian acts without explicit advance approval:

Where with certain things I can happily say to the minister that I 'wung' it [took a chance without pre-authorisation] – I took a decision that's gone right or gone wrong, that was going badly, whatever; there are certain things you think "actually she needs to be through that, if that goes wrong the criticism will come to her rather to us, so we need to wash that out" (25)

As this quotation shows, Sian quite often act based on her judgement of what the minister wants, and so without seeking explicit advance approval. She also chooses what to prioritise when she reports to her minister, and that choice is shaped by her assessment of the potential political ramifications for the minister. Overall however these discussions, and Sian's leadership, stay bounded: Sian as an SPS seeks to influence the minister on matters of delivery, but she does not challenge the core direction received.

Interim discussion: Mode A and agenda leadership

The findings above demonstrate a distinct sensemaking pathway across the three sensemaking 'moves' of noticing, framing and responding (Maitlis &

Christianson 2014), and the practices comprising the responding step meet the broad definition of leadership-in-government as embracing the full range of activities engaged in by post-holders within public organisations to influence others' actions, values and beliefs (t'Hart 2014).

Mode A reflects several characteristics of both the SPS role conceptualisations of 'manager' and 'leader' discussed in Chapter 3. I interpret Mode A as predominantly managerial in terms of purpose, and in terms of the SPS' relationship with the minister. First, the purpose of the SPS' leadership is afforded by ministerial direction, interpreted as unequivocal, and her sensemaking centres on delivery of that agenda in the short to medium term. This aligns to the manager role conceptualisation emerging from New Public Management, which reduced the advisory role of SPS and focussed them on delivery (Hood 1991, Foster 2001), encouraging the use of private sector tools and techniques to mitigate perceived weakness in public administrations' ability to 'deliver' (Matheson, Scanlan & Tanner 1997, Pollitt & Bouckaert 2011). The SPS relationship with the minister in Mode A centres on delivery of the agenda too. While the SPS offers advice, it is within this delivery frame, rather than more strategic. Further, combined with the focus on the short-to-medium term, the relationship between the SPS and her minister in Mode A is close to a 'minister-as-client' or 'principal-agent' model, which has been critiqued as representing the complete loss of the special advisory relationship so valued in Traditional Public Administration (Hood, 2000; MacDermott 2013, Richards & Smith 2016).

The arenas and practices of Mode A – where and how the SPS responds – however demonstrate an evolution from the classic NPM manager role

conceptualisation. The SPS focuses on arenas in which delivery occurs, but these now reflect the current governance era in which public services are delivered by organisations across the public, private and third sectors - and with which central government has a variable and complicated array of governance arrangements. As a result, Mode A responding includes the SPS influencing delivery partners across multiple sectors, acting as the public face of the agenda - alongside strategic design of the response, and managing change in her own department. This aligns Mode A to the more recently articulated entrepreneurial view of leadership in government, in which 'good' leadership is gauged in terms of its contribution to efficient and effective government (Koehler 1996, Rainey & Steinbauer 1999, Borins 2000, Van Wart 2003, Denis et al. 2005). The identification of Mode A thus also supports the position of Lodge & Gill (2011) that "the argument of a diagnosed mega-trend, from NPM to post-NPM, is difficult to sustain" (p.160).

Importantly, in these findings Mode A is more common than Mode B in both Wales and New Zealand, and informants across the board represented it as more prevalent. Indeed, for the majority of SPS interviewed, whether the cases they then discussed were Mode A or B, working to deliver the multiple priorities that together form their minister's (or ministers') agenda takes up the majority of their time and effort. Of the two modes of sensemaking uncovered, Mode A can therefore be understood as 'everyday' (Patriotta 2003) for SPS. It is a pattern of sensemaking that typically gives form to SPS' everyday experiences, and as such is more routinized, resulting from unconscious processes related to practical experience (Gioia & Mehra 1996). From this data, the entrepreneurial view of leadership in government can thus be taken as a prevalent practice to which everyday Mode A sensemaking conforms: it is constitutionally and

organisationally routine in Westminster system governments for the SPS to invoke the authority of the minister to shape and lead an agenda within the directions the minister has given (see Chapter 2). Further, everyday sensemaking is self-protective: its purpose is to help “an ongoing sense of situations in the face of events that might threaten existing orders” (Patriotta & Brown 2011, p.35), making it resilient to challenge.

The key factors that render Mode A everyday, normal sensemaking for SPS are the SPS’ role conception and personal mission, and the dominant logics of reform. In this data, the role conception is the main cognitive route through which Westminster conventions influence SPS strategic sensemaking. In Mode A, informants emphasized their role as subordinate to and serving the minister, with ministerial briefings focussed on delivering the agenda. They did not discuss holding more strategic policy conversations with the minister; ‘free and frank advice’ – a common term in New Zealand referring to the Traditional Public Administration role of the SPS (see Meier & O’Toole 2006, Du Gay 2009) – was deployed, but related to questions of ‘how’, rather than ‘why’. In Mode A, the SPS’ professional mission, self-identifying her as a professional manager, also contains a preference for delivery. All in all, in Mode A, SPS’ role conceptions and missions reflect a managerial interpretation of Westminster conventions that support an entrepreneurial view of leadership in government.

Mode A sensemaking also conforms to dominant logics of ‘systems thinking’ and ‘outcomes focus’ in New Zealand, and ‘austerity’, ‘collaboration’, ‘devolution’ in Wales. The dominant logics of reform are shared practices, comprising knowledge structures about the main drivers of change in government, and process preferences in terms of how to achieve it (Prahalad &

Bettis 1986). Differences in these dominant logics are intriguing, potentially themselves shaped by contextual factors such as the fiscal and institutional situations of each country's government, as well as SPS' locations in global policy networks. However, in terms of this study's findings, the similarities between the logics are perhaps more instructive than the differences: all the logics are interpreted by SPS *in relation to* the purpose and/or process of delivering the government's agenda. It is important to acknowledge that delivery is itself more broadly defined than the direct provision of services and extends to delivering outcomes with and through the network of delivery partners with which SPS must work, but nonetheless the logics are tied to the purpose of delivering ministerial objectives.

The dominant logics of reform connect via the central interest of NPM, delivery, but are not direct articulations of the NPM paradigm. In fact, the New Zealand dominant logics of reform seem to reflect the New Public Governance (NPG) paradigm which places SPS as network managers and partnership leaders (Osborne 2006, 2010, Pollitt & Bouckaert 2011). Wales' logic of 'collaboration', suggests a softer, more relational stance to New Zealand's 'systems thinking', nonetheless also fits with NPG. The dominant austerity logic in Wales is however more localised, and responds to potentially more transient structural conditions. This all suggests yet more layers are being added to the "already accreted and overlapping sediment of past reforms (Hood & Lodge, 2007)" (Tiernan 2015, p.216).

One implication of Mode A sensemaking forming the everyday norm is that dominant conventions, routines and schema are not interrupted: there is no stimulus that triggers equivocality about the plausible explanations that Sian's

current sensemaking offers. Politically intense cues are normal, perhaps counter-intuitively for observers unfamiliar with the operating of core executives in government (see also Rhodes 2005). Conventions, routines and practices are institutionalised categories of shared meaning built on past experience (Tsoukas 2005, Colville et al. 2012). They enable individuals to reach plausible interpretations and move into action quickly. They however hold disproportionate influence on sensemaking, providing short-term clarity but also encouraging people to notice fewer cues and ignore even more (Weick 2012).

Mode A can thus be understood to be triggered by perceptual cues that evoke certain identities, frames and patterns of action without involving much deliberate thought (Weber & Glynn 2006); it is a relatively simple sensemaking pathway which we can assume has become 'everyday' because it is useful. Everyday patterns of sensemaking nonetheless attract risks, as Weick (2012) and Weber & Glyn (2006) caution. For example, here, Sian simply accepts ministerial direction, and consequently any concerns about the social appropriateness (and to a lesser extent managerial achievability) of the agenda are subdued.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have offered a narrative account of Mode A sensemaking, and an interim discussion. In summary terms, in Mode A, the SPS accepts the ministerial direction that is offered, and as a result frames the challenge as a matter of implementation. She thus engages in leadership practices also related to delivery. This orientation towards delivery is further reinforced by her intrinsic

role conception and mission as a professional public manager. The dominant logics of reform at play in each locality also prime the SPS' framing of the challenge, and shape preferences towards different variants of delivery practices.

In my interim discussion of Mode A, I highlighted four main points. First, the practices clustered under agenda leadership do align to prominent definitions of leadership in government (see t'Hart 2014). Second, Mode A sensemaking and agenda leadership emerge as having a managerial character, rooted in the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm and focussed on implementation and effectiveness; it however also responds to the fact that today's public service system comprises many different delivery partners (which is often claimed as a characteristic of New Public Governance). As such, agenda leadership aligns to the entrepreneurial view of leadership-in-government, which prioritises notions of government effectiveness over constitutional integrity. Third, Mode A and agenda leadership emerge as everyday sensemaking for the cohort of SPS interviewed. They are both more common than Mode B and steward leadership, and are normalised. Accordingly, they are both reinforced by and themselves reinforce the professional manager role conceptualisation and a principal-agent relationship with the minister. As a consequence, these dominant conventions are unchallenged.

Following this initial presentation of Mode A in ideal-type narrative form and offering some initial theoretical reflections, I now move on, to tell the story of Mode B and steward leadership, and offer a first theoretical analysis of these as my second pattern of findings (Chapter 8).

Chapter 8 Findings: Mode B sensemaking and steward leadership

During my analysis, Mode B stood out as a distinct pattern with SPS' sensemaking drawing upon different preferences and logics to Mode A, and enabling and enacting a divergent cluster of leadership practices. In Mode A, the SPS' sensemaking about a strategic challenge is typically cued by political intensity. She accepts the ministerial direction that is offered, and frames the strategic challenge in terms of delivering the minister's direction. Her leadership practices thus cluster around delivery, and this emphasis is further reinforced by her intrinsic role conception and mission as a professional public manager, as well as by dominant logics of reform.

By contrast, Mode B entails a more complex sensemaking pathway. For a range of reasons, the SPS interprets greater equivocality in the direction offered by her minister, and in this context a combination of factors support the SPS to hold a divergent framing of a strategic challenge to her minister's – which then leads her to select a very different cluster of leadership practices. This second narrative account, presented below, is again followed by an interim discussion of its theoretical implications.

Ideal-type narrative account: Mode B and steward leadership

In Mode B, Sian is making sense of a strategic public challenge in the context of what she frames as much more equivocal ministerial direction. Whereas Mode A sensemaking is typically cued by political intensity, Sian can be triggered to

view her minister's direction as equivocal at any time. Instead, her perception of equivocality is triggered either because Sian perceives a gap in the strategic direction her minister has given, or because her interpretation of the challenge is incongruent with her minister's.

Gaps in ministerial direction arise for many reasons. Examples in this data include ministers prioritising other challenges in face of a large portfolio of responsibilities (21, 38); variations in ministers' personal styles, capacities and interests (2, 32); a lack of political appetite in face of politically contentious challenges (4, 25, 22, 31); and the minister having genuine uncertainty in the face of complex problems (2, 13, 40).

Equivocality of ministerial direction can also be generated when there is incongruence between Sian's sensemaking and her minister's. Here, Sian holds a different frame to her minister on whether or not to pay attention to the challenge, and/or the nature of the challenge, and/or the appropriate response to it. In one example, Sian believes a particular social issue is important and should be one of her department's strategic goals, but her minister does not share her view. Sian's manner is generally understated as she explains:

We have a particularly challenging minister, and this is an area of lesser comfort for that minister... It might not have a lot of direct, strong, political support for the long-term strategic goal, but it can be aligned and worked around the priorities that [the minister has]... (21)

The SPS obligations of confidentiality, security and anonymity are central to minister-SPS relationships in Westminster system governments (O'Toole 2006, Du Gay 2009); as a consequence, the examples of framing disagreements between SPS and their ministers tend to be oblique, found in a shift in Sian's

storytelling from 'we' to a distinction being made between the minister and herself:

About 18 months ago, she [the minister] commissioned us to lead some work... That's where the fun began, because in her sense ... [this delivery partner] was not operating effectively at all, in fact it was mostly incompetent, and we needed at the centre to improve ways of working, and that included quite a punitive approach to publishing performance information... So it was sort of 'game on' really, and we were ... in their view I suppose those dreadful people in the middle who are carrying out the minister's instructions, but clearly not to be trusted (32)

In this example, Sian reveals a divergence in the minister's and her interpretation of a challenge in how she distances herself and her department from her minister's framing: whilst avoiding direct criticism, Sian reveals a tension between her own and her minister's framings of the challenge by a shift towards the third person ('she' rather than 'we') and by metaphorically locating herself and her team separately ('... in the middle'). These subtle changes convey that Sian complied with the minister's instructions but did not agree with them, without explicitly admitting so.

A second example depicts a moment when Sian's minister changed her mind on policy direction:

[The minister] went to [a public event]... [a famous expert] gave an impassioned talk... [The minister] had been giving a speech that was referring to all the work that we were doing around the big system approach and the setting - instead she said, "something must be done!" ...So that sort of slightly diverted the work of the group and what I needed to do was to keep it within the frame of what we were trying to do in policy terms (29)

Sian's description of the moment of equivocality (the minister 'diverted the work'), and her articulation of her own task as being to control that diversion ('keep it within the frame of what we were trying to do') suggests that she holds

a different frame herself and sees herself, rather than the minister, as owning and steering policy direction.

Sian's framing of equivocality in ministerial direction generates a space, an opportunity for alternative framings to arise. *Unequivocal* ministerial direction, as in Mode A, is interpreted as affording clear constitutional legitimacy to a framing and proposed response to a strategic challenge, because the elected minister has provided them; where equivocality in ministerial direction occurs – whether owing to a gap or dissonance between Sian's interpretation and the minister's – it opens up the possibility for Sian to offer her own, alternative framing, but without the constitutional imprimatur of the minister. These framings combine two elements: a diagnosis of the challenge distinct from the minister's and, corresponding to that, an independent notion of how the government should respond (21,29,32,38).

When she interprets ministerial direction as equivocal, Sian draws on **alternative sources of legitimacy** to support her own, competing framing. In case 32, for example, Sian describes a speech she is making regularly to persuade others to adopt her framing, saying she is:

...taking the opportunity in as many fora as I can, including directly with the new minister to say, "Minister, you and your colleagues are here to improve the quality of life for [people], [delivery partners] are there to improve the quality of life for their communities. At the end of the day, you've got the same outcomes in common and it's about a better [country]. We need to work together to achieve that" (32)

This example illustrates that in Mode B, Sian not only offers a framing that diverges from ministerial direction but also that she seeks to reinforce that competing framing by calls upon alternative sources of legitimacy. To **justify**

the action, she is recommending (or defending if already done), Sian invokes both managerial legitimacy and values-based legitimacy. That is to say, Sian frames a need for action in terms of the efficiency and effectiveness of government, and/or by invoking shared values (sometimes conflated, as in the example above). She typically invokes managerial legitimacy for the proposed action indirectly, by reference to accepted norms of management practice, such as the need to plan, to have evidence, and by comparison to (international) good practice:

*So we are somewhat data blind and anecdote rich... how can you plan a system?
The other insight we had was that underneath this, there is a degree of evidence (25)*

I think there's a lot evidence that that would promote [this priority] (17)

...it is where international thinking and cutting edge, academic thinking is around these issues... (29)

Sian can also seek to legitimate her framing and responding by reference to commonly shared values. Such assertions of shared values can be made independently, but are often interwoven with invocations of managerial legitimacy, illustrated by the quotation from (32) above which appeals to a shared public purpose, using a managerial lexicon of outcomes and quality. Further examples of calls on sociological legitimacy to support Sian's divergent framing in this data include basing a need for action on the challenge in hand because: it is '*one of the great challenges*' in government at the moment (21); because it is '*an equity [fairness] issue*' (2); and, because it threatens a long-term '*general philosophy of openness in the country*' (17).

In Mode B, Sian is now offering a framing herself, rather than accepting one provided by her minister. Her invocations of managerial and values-based

legitimacy to support her framing are not random, but linked to her own intrinsic judgements and beliefs. Many 'Sian's' are quite open about holding a **personal, normative mission** and about the fact that this personal mission informs their sensemaking at work. This example, in which Sian describes her personal mission as directly informing what she interprets as 'her work', demonstrates:

I have my own personal passions about equity and equality, and disadvantage, just from my own personal experience as well, that I felt like I could make a difference... I did work years ago at [organisation], which was my place I really wanted to be, but I realised they don't have the power and influence that [this organisation] does, so I can do my work better here (3)

Here, Sian openly describes how her personal mission has shaped her SPS career, to the extent that she has chosen to move departments to achieve a position where she has greater access to governmental 'power and influence' which she can use to pursue her mission. Further examples illustrate Sian's personal, value-driven mission underpinning her justification for the action she is advocating or taking. In one instance, Sian talks about a challenge that affects her 'more personally than anything else', and describes how she is going beyond her formal job to influence what she believes need to happen in response, feeling that getting action on this challenge would be her '*legacy*' (18). In another, she describes '*why I'm here*' in terms of a personal mission to ensure an academic perspective gets '*into the bloodstream*' of government thinking on her strategic challenge (38). Crucially, compared to Mode A, it is Sian's personal values-based mission that is invoked in Mode B over a sense of mission connected to her professional identity.

As well as seeking to legitimise her framing of the action needed, Sian also seeks to **frame her own agency as legitimate**. This is important because

Sian's framing needs to persuade others not only that the action is appropriate but also to justify her personally to act. In Mode B however, Sian cannot claim the clear constitutional legitimacy afforded to her when there is unequivocal ministerial direction and she acts as an agent of her minister's will. Instead, she asserts her own agency as legitimate by invoking a role conception that affords some independence, and/or by reference to her own social standing, as I now explain.

First, Sian asserts her own agency as legitimate by drawing upon a role conception that offers SPS a logic for agency independent of ministers (17, 18, 21, 29, 32, 38). Her role conception in Mode B (in New Zealand) draws heavily on the dominant logic of '**stewardship**'. The concept of stewardship was formally introduced in the 2013 State Sector Act as a requirement upon departmental chief executives (equivalent to permanent secretaries) to consider the needs of future ministers, as part of their responsibility to their current minister (22). The concern underlying the introduction of stewardship, widely reported in interviews, was to provide a counterbalance to a perceived loss of capacity in central government departments to think or act strategically and long-term. In New Zealand, then, Sian is able to draw upon a logic now captured in legislation that demands that she both serves today's government and considers the probable needs of the future. The logic of stewardship is both relatively new and very broadly articulated. As a result, it is being variably interpreted and practiced across the New Zealand state sector today, and will evolve:

So, we have a role independent of the current government around the sustainability of the public service and the sectors that we're responsible for... It has more of an effect in theory than in practise, so it's still viewed as a new provision. It's still honoured in the breach, more than in the effect (10).

Nonetheless, the logic of stewardship is evident in New Zealand – it was discussed in all interviews – and it affords Sian an opportunity of legitimate independent agency *if* she wants to call upon it. In Mode B, she does so, articulating her role as ‘*keeping an eye on a longer term view*’ as well as ‘*serving today’s ministers*’ (21), in order ‘*to cultivate the system so that it’s able to... advise the governments of tomorrow*’ (17).

By contrast, in Mode B in Wales, Sian’s role conception does not contain a dominant logic equivalent to that of stewardship in New Zealand, though it does embrace an ability to think strategically about the system of government, and a capacity to handle ambiguity (38). Instead, in order to legitimate her agency independent of the minister, Sian in Wales draws more on a reading of **her own social standing** with influential groups beyond government – academia, international organisations, globally-renowned experts, civic society (29, 38). This is seen in references to her individual and team’s reputation and relationships with important communities outside government, as well as in her own identity as a professional, exemplified by the assertions below:

We’ve obviously got our international networks... And yeah, we are at the cutting edge of most of this work. We are one of the... it was great on the [policy name] stuff, we were one of the governments that was invited to meet [global leader]. So this is a thank you for the work we’ve done to make this possible, by showing you can do it (29)

I had already been a [very senior role], I’ve run [big, complex organisations], had a lot of [big projects], et cetera... there’s probably one or two who might be slightly longer than me but very few (7)

In both these examples, Sian is asserting her standing beyond her minister, and beyond the government she works within; for her these independent

relationships and experiences afford her some legitimate personal agency, and this forms a key step on her path towards steward leadership. Sian's reading of her independent standing is however both subjective, and stretches beyond constitutional norms. (It is notable that 'Sian' asserts independent standing much more in New Zealand than in Wales). Nonetheless, a reading of independent standing is a critical enabler in Sian's Mode B sensemaking in Wales, and is a factor across all sensemaking that supports SPS taking leadership too.

In parallel to legitimacy concerns, and Sian's underpinning role conception, mission and independent standing, in Mode B the locus of the challenge is framed differently. Here, Sian interprets the challenge – whether it is (sufficiently) noticed, how it is framed, and the government's response - as not yet settled. Accordingly, she frames the challenge in **political or governance terms**. The immediate locus of the challenge for Sian is therefore not within the public service delivery system (as in Mode A), but within the governance system or wider society – where she needs to stimulate attention to the challenge and/or champion her framing and proposed response. In one such example, Sian frames the challenge as influencing a debate between politicians (2); in another, she describes being able to respond to a challenge properly only when consensus has arisen for the proposed action (38). This governance framing also leads Sian to a view that change is required at a society and/or system level, not just within public services, as the examples below illustrate. The implication is that the change required is unlikely to be achieved managerially but will demand negotiation of values, meanings and relationships as prerequisites to action:

Yeah, well basically all of the things we work on are essentially complex systems which have suffered from having very diverse policy and institutional and legislative frameworks which don't reflect the fact that they are one system, or a series of interlocking systems (29)

In this first example, Sian interprets the challenge as requiring action across multiple systems (though notably still highlighting aspects of those systems – policy, legislation and institutions - that are within government's purview to change). In the next example, Sian frames the challenge even more broadly, as the status of a community within the country – a framing which offers an even more strategic starting point for thinking about appropriate responding actions:

The [strategic challenge] that continuously stands out for me is... the position of [a community] in our society and economy (21)

Sian's role conception and sense of independent standing, discussed above, also prime her to frame the challenge in these terms. In both sites, her reading of her own independent standing encourages Sian to be sensitive to the complex networks of interest around government. As the excerpt below shows, here, Sian considers herself as part of an élite network, which demands significant attention:

... there is always interplay of course between what comes from us and what's coming through the political networks and the SPADs ... interfacing with that all the time, interfacing with civil society all the time. So we are part of that nexus (29)

To summarise the process so far, in Mode B, the absence of unequivocal ministerial direction on a strategic challenge generates a space in which alternative framings can be offered. Sian offers a framing in this space; she frames the locus of challenge in governance terms, with the implication that action is needed within the governance system or society to reach a shared

framing, before delivery work can begin. In the absence of clear constitutional legitimacy via unequivocal ministerial direction, Sian frames acting on this challenge, and her own agency, as legitimate by drawing on her own sense of personal mission, on managerial and social norms, on her conception of her own role (which has a different emphasis to the role conception supporting Mode A sensemaking), and on the dominant logic of stewardship (in New Zealand only).

Sian's **responding** then comprises practices that logically fit with her framing. She has individually developed a cognitive framing that characterises this strategic challenge as important and demanding government attention and action. Sian's framing is however not congruent with her minister's, and may or may not be congruent with other key actors' in her environment. Sian has also framed it as legitimate to act herself. Outside ministerial authority, and on her own, however, Sian can only command limited resources; she needs to convince others of her framing, transforming it from being individually-held to being shared. Sian therefore engages in practices to progress this outcome: she seeks to influence others within the government system; she may enter the public debate to influence wider stakeholders, though this is rarer; and she seeks to align the resources under their direct control towards her framing of the challenge and the action required. Crucially, she also works to shift her minister's framing. Together, these practices combine into a mutually-reinforcing pattern of responding:

Sian seeks to **influence her minister's framing**. At the start, she may simply create sufficient ministerial permission to afford her some constitutional legitimacy to take small actions; over time she may take opportunities to

persuade, or 'nudge' (32) the minister and the government towards fuller adoption of her frame, and therefore towards allocation of government resources to the challenge she has noticed and is championing. Sian does this influencing within the normal context of ministerial briefings, meetings, conversations and speech-writing. In the first example below, Sian candidly explains that, sensing a gap in ministerial direction, she has personally developed the government's strategy on a particular (and very significant) strategic challenge:

I have done most of the thinking about this and written most of the ministers' speeches, the big picture type of things... But basically, I've done it (38)

In the next example, Sian describes a sustained effort by her and her team to support a minister to first accept, and then promote, a framing Sian was championing:

We had to basically coach [the minister]... I make it sound like it was easy but it's six months' worth of work for her to get the confidence to go and really tackle it (2)

In this third example, Sian suggests that through delicate judgement ('fine art'), an SPS can shift a government agenda without ministers noticing; by connecting these practices to the logic of stewardship, Sian is also asserting these practices as legitimate:

That's that fine art of stewardship, when you can actually nudge in a direction that the government doesn't even realise it's going, contrary to its own (32)

These examples highlight Sian as an SPS deliberately seeking to shift ministerial framing of a strategic challenge sufficiently towards a framing she is

championing, to enable her to take actions she would like to take but for which she needs the imprimatur of the minister and the associated constitutional legitimacy; this is described by one informant as the '*nack of the job*' (21). It is important to note at this moment that the data presented here is one-sided and seeks to uncover *Sian*'s influencing; her own framing may of course evolve too during these exchanges.

In parallel, Sian puts effort into **influencing wider system thinking** on the strategic challenge, through conversations, meetings, and (less commonly) written formats, with an array of stakeholders who can potentially help to reframe the wider debate. The stakeholders can be colleagues in other departments, people in service delivery agencies (of any sector), and other parties involved in policy development and implementation. As one 'Sian' explains in her case, '*you're just trying to use those channels to get people talking about the right stuff...*' (17). Sian may frame her actions at this point as promoting her framing, but she may also be aiming to stimulate '*a good debate*' (2), and have a less precisely held view on what action should be taken. This looser, emergent approach reflects an understanding of the complex interplay of multiple interests and demands in government and the indirect route towards strategic ambitions that often results, as acknowledged here:

... we don't have simple, straightforward objectives, we have [a] multiplicity of objectives and a multiplicity of pressures and you have to be prepared to be flexible and to understand that although there may be an overall goal, it is certainly not a straight line in order to get from where you want to where you're going...(38)

Though less common, Sian may also **enter civic debate**. This takes the form of engagement with think tanks, academics, '*the commentariat*' (17) through

conversations, and also participation in seminars and conferences (28, 32).

Where Sian or her organisation benefits from legal independence, she may also contribute to public debate via formal publications; for example the New Zealand Treasury independently publishes regular economic and fiscal updates. Making public speeches is a relatively new practice for senior public servants in Westminster systems, previously observed by Grube (2012). In this data, this practice was a small but significant element of Sian's responding, done with broad permission of ministers. The quotation below elucidates the potential value to Sian of successfully influencing wider system thinking:

So we'd socialized it, you know, but it wasn't something that was coming from anywhere other than us. So we introduced the concept, we'd worked with it, and [political parties] had their opportunity to pick it up or not as an issue (29)

As part of her Mode B responding, Sian also **realigns some of the resources** at her disposal towards addressing the strategic challenge. Examples include creating new posts, creating special projects, and changing ways of working to orientate the organisation more effectively to her framing of the challenge. While this practice falls within Sian's scope of formal responsibility, influencing is repeated as crucial. As Sian says here, '*I'm just hammering the message*' (32). Where Sian's influencing is successful, she can attract more resources – ultimately potentially via her framing becoming core government policy, as in the case of (29) above. Mode B responding practices can therefore be understood as an intertwining iterative cycle.

In Mode B, Sian's responding practices are notably characterised by a sense of needing to be **opportunistic**. The majority of her time and resources are dedicated to working on strategic agendas prioritised by ministers (as in Mode

A); tackling challenges that are beyond or to the periphery of ministers' interests must be done with the remaining personal energy and resources at her disposal:

So I don't really have a plan in that sense, I don't have a list that I've got to do this - it's more opportunistic (17)

We have this window of opportunity until maybe the middle of the year... (32)

It's emergent, I would say as opposed to well planned (21)

Finally, in two Mode B cases, 'Sian' had worked on the respective strategic challenge for over a decade. Both of these cases afford examples of SPS shifting between modes A and B sensemaking: Sian had been successful in influencing colleagues, stakeholders and ministers towards acting on a particular strategic challenge which at the time was not a priority for that government; once successful, she led the design of the strategic response, gaining ministerial support, and as a result she was tasked by ministers to deliver it (so shifting from Mode B into Mode A). In both cases, Sian describes influencing ministers and wider stakeholders constantly over the years, framing and re-framing the nature of the strategic challenge for them, shaping the government's strategic intention, and proposing the response. In one example, Sian contrasts ministers' intermittent ('ad hoc') grip on the strategic direction - not uncommon for ministers working across large portfolios and responding to political dynamics - to the longer-term expert influence she has been able to exert:

On the whole, ministers have dealt with this on an ad hoc pragmatic basis, as issues have been presented to them. I have done most of the thinking about this and written most of the ministers' speeches, the big picture type of things... basically, I've done it (38)

In another example, Sian even more clearly describes her practices as exerting her framing to shape government action:

One is just exerting your will over the process... things drift, things go off in different directions, things lose the plot – we are very poor at holding the intellectual framing of something - and a lot of what I do in these circumstances is to keep, you know, keep the sense of why we are doing this and what fits and what doesn't. So a lot of personal will expressed in that sense (29)

These cases demonstrate that SPS can and do shift between modes A and B over time, shifting between delivering a ministerially-defined agenda, and contesting and shaping, 'stewarding', the strategic agenda themselves.

Interim discussion: Mode B and steward leadership

The findings above demonstrate a second distinct pathway across the three sensemaking 'moves' of noticing, framing and responding (Maitlis & Christianson 2014). The responding practices in Mode B, as in Mode A, fit the broad definition of leadership-in-government as embracing the full range of activities engaged in by post-holders within public organisations to influence others' actions, values and beliefs (t'Hart 2014); however, as the narrative account above shows, the patterns of interpretation and action are very different.

In Mode B, SPS sensemaking is triggered by a disruption to the individual's understanding of the world in the form of a feeling of equivocality about the ministerial direction given. Unlike Mode A, the trigger to Mode B sensemaking is a noticeable experience for the individual involved and shifts her towards more

deliberate reasoning processes (Weber & Glynn 2006). This trigger places Mode B sensemaking more resolutely as sensemaking as 'traditionally' framed, originating from disruptive ambiguity which forces people to make sense of events retrospectively (Weick et al. 2005, Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015). As such it contrasts to Mode A 'everyday' sensemaking, in which taken-for-granted knowledge structures, routines and practices are significant constituents of meaning making (Patriotta 2003, Maitlis 2005). It is important to underscore here that interpreting ministerial direction is a core skill and practice for SPS. In Chapter 7, I offered an example of an SPS priding herself on being able to judge what the minister wanted, and over time being able to act on her behalf with very little direct input. Richards & Smith (2004) term such communication between minister and SPS 'a form of social-interpretative [sic] osmosis' (p.13). It is typical, and from the SPS perspective key to building trust with the minister (32). For an SPS to interpret a ministerial direction as equivocal is thus an unusual if not extreme step.

Mode A can also be understood as working within everyday notions of constitutional propriety. That is to say, in Mode A, the minister's direction is accepted, and therefore an everyday, simplistic, norm of the minister embodying constitutional legitimacy is upheld. In Mode B, however, the SPS interprets ministerial direction as equivocal and offers her own framing, and a more complex claim to legitimacy must be constructed and conveyed; furthermore, the leadership practices the SPS selects are also orientated to generating greater support for her preferred framing. The experience of equivocality is thus crucial, and shapes each move of Mode B sensemaking.

The sensemaking pathway in Mode B is also made more complex because it is not everyday sensemaking. As such, Mode B involves the SPS operating outside some dominant logics and or norms, with each move of noticing, framing and responding being non-routine - and orientated to generating legitimacy. The narrative shows that legitimacy concerns become central when the SPS is in Mode B: once the SPS is engaging in independent sensemaking, she is no longer acting on behalf of the minister constitutionally and as such draws on alternative, managerial and sociological, sources of legitimacy to assert both her actions and her own agency as appropriate. Abolafia's (2010) articulation of the 'logic of appropriateness' at play for sensemakers in public spheres is perhaps apt; for this study, it describes both the combined appeals SPS make to multiple sources of legitimacy in Mode B framing, and to the leadership practices they select.

Despite legitimacy being well documented in the sensemaking literature, I was surprised when it emerged as a central factor in Mode B during my analysis. I realised that my professional experience had created a subconscious assumption that SPS would – as I told myself I did – pay full attention to achieving outcomes for society and very little to their own legitimacy, which I perceived as a little self-interested. The Mode B narrative however shows that legitimacy *is* important, and rather than being tied to self-interest, is perceived by SPS to be essential to getting things done: to accept your framing and course of action, people must feel it is appropriate, and that your role in achieving it is also appropriate. The presence of multiple, sometimes competing sources of legitimacy – constitutional, managerial and values-based – renders making claims to legitimacy a sophisticated practice of sensemaking.

In detailing the SPS sensemaking pathway and pattern of leadership practices when they are diverging from ministerial direction, the Mode B findings reveal how SPS accomplish agency independent of ministers within the institutions and conventions of Westminster system governments. Considered from the perspective of the public administration literature (chapters 2 and 3), these findings hold potentially significant implications. Mode B shows SPS not simply acting as agents to their ministerial principals, as desired by ideological proponents of NPM (Foster 2001); instead, drawing from their own personal missions, from managerial and social norms, and from the prevalent dominant logics of reform, they generate framings and lead independently of ministers.

These empirical findings confront two Westminster myths. It is difficult to conceptualise SPS as neutral when the Mode B findings in particular highlight that personal missions and preferences are central to their noticing, framing and responding. Neutrality is a core element of the 'public service ethos' which is described as guiding (senior) civil servant behaviour (Du Gay 2002, O'Toole 2006); by respecting the public service ethos, SPS are afforded the privilege of advising and representing ministers, in private. The Mode B findings especially demonstrate that SPS are influenced by a range of intrinsic as well as extrinsic factors, raising the question whether the ethos of office – and neutrality - is humanly possible. Further, the fact that SPS engage in sensemaking and leadership that sometimes diverges from ministers' supports Richards & Smith's (2016) assertion that the convention of indivisibility of minister and civil servant is a myth.

However while the Mode B findings show in detail how independently-generated steward leadership is accomplished by SPS, they also suggest some

boundaries to it. First, the personal value missions and preferences identified as shaping SPS sensemaking in Mode B may diverge from the minister's priorities, but they are widely-held values. The examples quoted in the narrative showed SPS' sensemaking clearly and openly motivated by commitments to values such as equality, sustainability, economic success, and strengthening devolution. So, while the findings show SPS' individual preferences fundamentally contesting a minister's direction, this data suggests they are likely to promote a framing that remains within locally-appropriate values. SPS preferences can be important influence on government power via their sensemaking but are not, as reported here, revolutionary.

A second boundary to the independence of steward leadership is evidenced in the cluster of practices it comprises: steward leadership is dominated by practices aimed at increasing legitimacy and support for the SPS' interpretation of the challenge (both what it is and what might be done about it). Three of the four practices are: engaging in influencing the minister's thinking, wider system stakeholder thinking, and possibly entering public debate to influence there. Steward leadership is thus orientated towards building greater support, and will depend on many others' acquiescence to have impact beyond the SPS' home department.

While data was only gathered from the perspective of individual SPS, steward leadership practices, as the Mode B pattern of responding, resonate with Kaplan's (2008) notion of framing contests, in which people engage with others aiming to "transform their own cognitive frames of a situation into predominant frames" (p.729). This is well illustrated by 'Sian' (32) who describes the 'fine art' of nudging 'in a direction that the government doesn't even realise it's going,

contrary to its own'; for SPS then framing contests are apt, but are engaged in with subtlety. Nonetheless, SPS are engaged in a form of sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991) that is competitive because democratic Westminster governments are arenas characterised by a plurality of voices; SPS wanting to promote their framing of a challenge must engage in framing contests within their own organisations, with the minister, and in wider arenas that shape government thinking. In this data, some SPS described the purpose of their Mode B responding practices as simply trying to get a strategic challenge 'on the agenda', and suggested they were comfortable for a strategic response to emerge from collective processes rather than promoting their own response strategy. This contrasts with the more self-interested accent to Kaplan's (2008) practitioners, raising an interesting question for future research, about the characteristics of framing contests within the administrative arm of government: a practice-based sensemaking perspective would suggest framing contests in government are likely to be intrinsically connected to both identity protection, and the political pursuit of interests (Baez & Abolafia 2002, Kaplan 2008, Helms Mills et al. 2010, Brown et al. 2015). I return to these findings and discuss their constitutional and practical implications further in Chapter 10.

Finally, I find that a role conception that affords access to a legitimate claim to independent agency is one of the most important enablers to Mode B sensemaking and steward leadership. This is revealed by comparing the prevalence of Mode B sensemaking across New Zealand and Wales. In this study, there were far more cases of Mode B sensemaking in New Zealand than in Wales. A possible explanation can be traced to a new dominant logic of 'stewardship' recently introduced in New Zealand, interpreted by one as a duty upon departmental chief executives (equivalent to permanent secretaries) to

'consider the needs of future ministers, as part of their responsibility to their current minister' (22). The widely-acknowledged aim of such a concept was to provide a counterbalance to a perception that the senior echelons in central government departments were responding only to their current ministers' immediate demands, and had lost the capacity to think or act strategically (30). The expectation of stewardship was communicated at a very high level in legislation and through a few speeches. Nonetheless from my interviews, it is clear that the idea of stewardship is already influencing SPS sensemaking: almost all informants in New Zealand referenced stewardship, and many shared their emergent interpretation of the intention of the new duty, and its meaning for their day-to-day practices. In particular, it has imbued New Zealand SPS' role conceptions with a notion of legitimate independent agency, separate from elected ministers, which can be used for the purpose of addressing the needs of the future (however they interpret it). As such, the logic of stewardship affords crucial support to SPS sensemaking when they choose to contest a minister's framing on a strategic challenge. While only indicative given the qualitative nature of this study, far fewer SPS presented cases of Mode B sensemaking in Wales where no similar logic legitimising independent agency for SPS is invoked by informants. Rather, in Wales, the fewer cases fitting Mode B sensemaking drew more heavily on their reading of their independent standing instead.

Chapter summary

In this second findings chapter, I have offered a narrative account of Mode B sensemaking, and an interim discussion. My aim has been to convey the story

of Mode B as an ideal-type individual sensemaking process that constitutes a second mode of SPS leadership in Westminster system governments. Mode B shows SPS, triggered by equivocality in ministerial direction, developing and offering an alternative frame to a strategic challenge. Questions of legitimacy about the (proposed) frame and response, and of their own agency, are central to both framing and responding. The SPS frame their responding as legitimate by drawing on different dominant logics of reform than those used in Mode A, and by drawing on their personal value missions, role conceptions, and a reading of their personal social standing.

In my interim discussion of Mode B, I highlighted four main points. First, I suggested that as Mode B is triggered by the comparatively rare cue of equivocality of ministerial direction, it aligns to the Weickian view of sensemaking being triggered occasionally, often in times of crisis or puzzlement (Weick et al. 2005, Brown et al. 2015). Second, I showed that in this equivocal context of operating outside clear ministerial direction, legitimacy becomes a central concern shaping both the SPS' framing and responding (leadership practices). Third I suggested that Mode B demonstrates the SPS asserting her leadership agency independent of her elected minister, and that the pattern of leadership practices she selects resonates with Kaplan's (2008) 'framing contests'; and fourth, I noted the significant influence of the logic of stewardship on SPS role conceptions in New Zealand, which has resulted in Mode B leadership being much more prevalent there than in Wales (in this data).

Having told the stories of Mode A and agenda leadership, and Mode B and steward leadership, and offered an initial discussion of each, I turn in the next chapter to the task of translating these narratives into a process model, so that

these findings may in the future be empirically tested. I do so through critical discussion of the central constructs uncovered and my analysis of the linkages between them.

Chapter 9 Findings: constructing an inductive model

In Chapters 7 and 8, I presented my findings on SPS sensemaking pathways that enable and enact leadership in the form of two ideal-type narrative accounts that conveyed two distinct pathways taken across the sensemaking moves of noticing, framing and responding. I offered interim discussions of these findings, interpreting Mode A and agenda leadership as everyday sensemaking that conforms to an everyday norm of following ministerial direction, and has an entrepreneurial management character. By contrast, I interpreted Mode B and steward leadership as triggered by an SPS sensing equivocality in her minister's direction, and comprising the SPS developing and offering an alternative, competing framing of the nature of the challenge and the appropriate strategic response.

In this chapter, again drawing on my interview data, I take on the task of constructing an inductive process model to complement the narrative accounts. My aim in doing so is to meet my aspiration to produce rigorous qualitative research with the potential to afford testable explanations. My overarching approach to model development is inspired by the Gioia Methodology (Gioia et al. 2013) described in Chapter 5, and I afford an account of the detailed steps taken as the first element of this chapter. I then instantiate the study's key concepts, before presenting my analysis of the dynamic relationships between these concepts, diagrammatically mapping the sensemaking pathways that enable and constitute agenda leadership (Mode A) and steward leadership (Mode B). In this way, drawing on the data from my interviews, narrative accounts and interim analyses in Chapters 7 and 8, I uncover key ways in

which these factors combine to support these two distinct patterns of SPS leadership. Before moving to the model itself, however, I report on the process followed.

Developing the model

Within the framework explained in Chapter 5, I generated the inductive process model in two steps. The first step was to instantiate the key concepts. Each interview was initially coded separately; I then sought to group similar codes, assembling them into first-order categories, and retaining the exact phrasing used by the informants wherever possible. I continued first-order coding until all groups of codes that were shared across informants and across sites were captured. I then began to consider potential theoretical connections between categories, which could form the second-order themes - theoretically distinctive, researcher-induced concepts, formulated at an abstract level (Nag & Gioia 2012). Where possible, I again retained informants' phrasings, though the priority was to articulate the emerging concepts accurately. Next, I mapped the second-order themes to aggregate dimensions. Throughout each step I was constantly cycling back into to the literature, drawing both on public administration and sensemaking scholarship to make theoretical sense of my data.

The second step was the graphical design of the model, requiring me to map the connections between the instantiated concepts precisely. To do so, I searched for language in the first order codes that indicated the direction of influence between concepts. Some data were transparent; for example, '*I was*

tasked with implementing change operationally... (33) and *'a charge from the minister to [name] and I: 'sort it out'* both show ministerial direction (concept) influencing the SPS' framing of the locus of the challenge (concept). Similar directions of influence between other concepts emerged too, such as an SPS' role conception (concept) shaping her leadership practices (here, the concept of steward leadership): *'...part of the nature of my role too is it's very much a system role, so a lot of what I do is working across that system'* (24). I initially mapped these linkages between key concepts by hand, referring back to the data tables repeatedly as I did so. The final versions, produced in PowerPoint, reflect the key influences between each concept, pared back to those supported by the majority of cases allocated to either Mode A and agenda leadership, or Mode B and steward leadership.

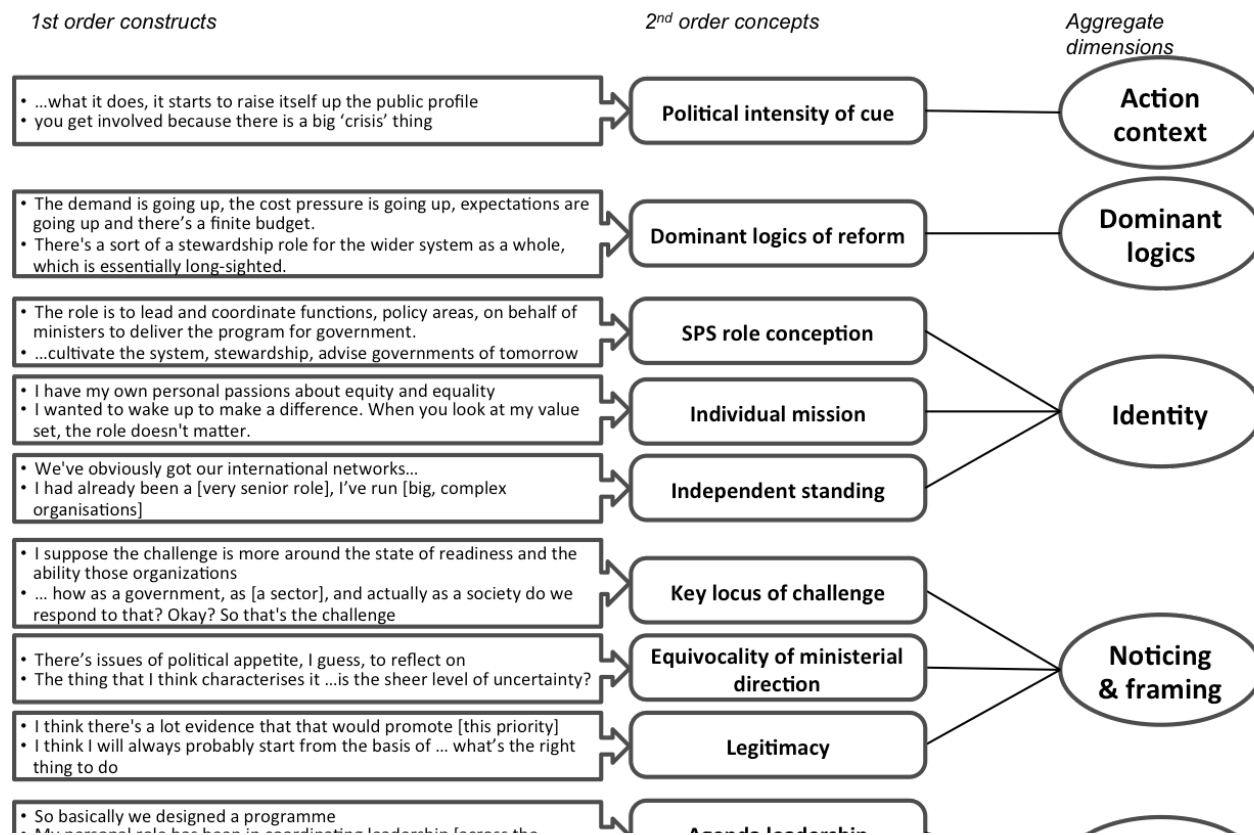
Sensemaking is about connecting cues and frames to create an account of what is going on (Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010). For my own process of making sense of my findings, this step of mapping pathways between concepts proved invaluable. Articulating the dynamic linkages between the concepts obliged accuracy as I sought to answer the perennial question, 'what exactly is going on here?' (Weick 1995). I found, as Gioia et al. (2013) suggest, that paying detailed attention to linkages affords the possibility of theoretical insights that are not apparent simply by inspecting the data structure or narrative accounts by themselves.

Key concepts

Figure 9.1 (overleaf) presents my summary data structure, which demonstrates the connections between first-order constructs (those meaningful to my SPS informants) and second-order concepts (induced by me as researcher) that inform my articulation of aggregate dimensions. Ten second-order concepts emerge as most important from the analysis: the political intensity of the cue; legitimacy; equivocality in ministerial direction; dominant logics of reform; SPS role conception; individual mission; independent standing; key locus of the challenge; agenda leadership; and, steward leadership. These can then be logically grouped into five aggregate dimensions: (i) noticing and framing, and (ii) responding – which reflect the three central moves of sensemaking (Daft & Weick 1984, Thomas et al. 1993, Weber & Glynn 2006, Maitlis & Christianson 2014); and then three further aggregate dimensions of (iii) the immediate action context, (iv) dominant logics, and (v) identity - which cluster the main extrinsic and intrinsic influences on SPS sensemaking.

The summary data structure (figure 9.1) is a visual demonstration of these inductively-derived components of the model, which I provide in order to render the connections between first-order constructs, second-order concepts and aggregate dimensions transparent. It is underpinned by detailed data tables that document the grouping of first-order constructs into second-order concepts in detail. These tables are an important product of the analysis undertaken which readers are encouraged to examine, and can be found at Appendix A.

Figure 9.1
Summary data structure



Crucially, the work of creating the data structure compelled me to think about my data theoretically (Gioia et al. 2013). I now instantiate the emergent concepts, seeking to provide a clear theoretical articulation of each, engaging with key literature.

Immediate action context

The construct of the ‘immediate action context’ (Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015), encourages us to take account of the localised and temporal conditions within which moments of sensemaking are located. In this study one factor in the immediate action context emerges as especially influential: the **political intensity of the cue**. Political intensity describes the pressure felt by a SPS to pay attention to a challenge, and to respond to it. The pressure is political rather than rational because it is driven by the amount of ‘noise’ (7) about the challenge in the political system; it reaches the SPS both directly from system stakeholders, and indirectly via the minister(s) the SPS is serving. The cue thus springs from events outside government, but the SPS’ feeling of pressure is strongly influenced by anticipated and actual ministerial pressure. The main impact of this factor is that higher political intensity increases expectations of government action in the short term (for example, in calls demanding ‘something must be done’). It reduces time for interpretation of the challenge, and encourages SPS to rely on existing knowledge and routines. As discussed in Chapter 8, politically intense cuing is normal for SPS in central governments, and routines and norms are correspondingly well-established (Rhodes 2011).

Structural logics

In this study, the aggregate dimension of structural logics is constituted by two concepts: the dominant logics of reform, and SPS role conceptualisations. I define structural logics as broad, shared belief systems in operation in the contexts of the research sites. They comprise knowledge structures about the challenge and context in hand, and process preferences in terms of how to achieve it (Bettis & Prahalad 1995). Notably, they are not necessarily coherent, but they are prevailing cognitive, normative and regulatory forces that prime, edit or trigger sensemaking (Weber & Glynn 2006). So while dominant logics have traditionally been cast as an “information filter” limiting attention to data the logics deem relevant (Bettis & Prahalad 1995, p.7), here I align with Weber & Glynn in finding structural logics not only *constraining* but also *enabling* SPS sensemaking and leadership.

The **dominant logics of reform** represent knowledge structures about the main drivers of change in government, and process preferences in terms of how to achieve that change. As shown in Chapter 8, for SPS in New Zealand the dominant logics of reform are systems thinking, outcome focus and stewardship; whereas for SPS in Wales, logics of austerity, collaboration and devolution dominate. The differences in the dominant logics of reform at play in the two research sites emphasises their rootedness in time and place (Lounsbury 2007, Hills, Voronov & Hinings 2013). The case of the logic of stewardship illustrates the strength of influence that dominant logics of reform can hold on SPS sensemaking. As shown in Chapter 8, the logic of stewardship is evident in all cases of steward leadership in New Zealand, and was clearly cited by informants as influencing their sensemaking.

The second set of structural logics influential upon SPS sensemaking is **SPS role conceptualisations**. In Chapter 2, I discussed three dominant role conceptualisations in Westminster system governments, and the governance paradigms to which they are aligned: the administrator role and public administration paradigm; the manager role and New Public Management (NPM) paradigm; and the leader role and the emergent governance paradigm. SPS internalise these external role conceptualisations into role *conceptions* which select and simplify the complex competing external conceptualisations surrounding their role (Stout 2012). In this study, role conceptions are the main cognitive path through which key Westminster logics influence SPS sensemaking and leadership. As anticipated, informants' role conceptions resonated strongly with the external role conceptualisations discussed in Chapter 2 – but not separately. Instead, SPS role conceptions in this study reflect the recent finding that in practice, more recent paradigms are not replacing previous ones, but instead “rather than “pendulum swings,” we are observing a process of “layering”” (Lodge & Gill 2011, p.160) in which each new public administration paradigm and associated role conceptualisation adds new expectations of values, tasks, skills and behaviours to the bundle of expectations already facing SPS. In the cases studied, SPS' internalised role conceptions reflect mixtures of all three role conceptualisations discussed in Chapter 2 - administrator, manager and leader – typically with a leaning towards either manager or leader. Echoing the language used in my research sites, I label these conceptions ‘professional manager’, and ‘governance’, which lean towards manager and leader respectively. The administrator role conception contributes to both of these (see below), but did not come through strongly.

The 'professional manager' role conception, as found in the Mode A narrative, reflects SPS who concentrate on the delivery dimension of the role, foregrounding issues and practices associated with driving change in the public service system and within the home government itself. I use the prefix 'professional' to emphasize that the impression given by many SPS in these cases was that they are managers-in-government, rather than public-servants-who-manage; the managerial identity coming before or equal to the public servant aspect of identity. SPS with a 'professional manager' role conception offer ministers 'free and frank advice' (7,18,33) but typically within their orientation towards effective, managerial delivery. They locate themselves as serving ministers, leading and advising on their behalf (16,25,33) leaning towards an interpretation of themselves as agents to their elected ministerial principal. The 'professional manager' role conception thus resonates with the NPM manager role conceptualisation in the literature (Hood 1991, Borins 2000, Pyper & Burnham 2011).

The 'governance' role conception reflects a cluster of typically more senior SPS across both sites who perceive their role as a balance between offering advice and delivering the minister's agenda, supported by a greater reference to strategic policy or 'systems' perspective (18,29,38). In this data, the governance role conception is strongly primed by dominant logics of 'stewardship' and 'systems thinking'. The logic of stewardship imbues the governance role conception with a constitutional responsibility independent of the minister. This role conception however also locates SPS within networks across service delivery partners, and into wider society; they are more likely to frame a challenge as located in society or in political governance structures, rather than as located only within the delivery system. The 'governance' role conception

thus resonates most with the 'leader' role identified in Chapter 2, which suggests working across multiple arenas through partnerships, drawing on private sector practices but paying attention to the particular purpose and dynamics of the public sector (Hartley & Benington 2011). As a consequence, their responding is more likely to emphasize influencing than commanding (Brookes & Grint 2010; t'Hart, 2014), and a preference for engaging in the negotiation of values, meanings and relationships as prerequisites to action through networks (Agranoff 2006, Osborne 2006) – a pattern reflected in Mode B sensemaking in this study.

It is important to note that the two role conceptions defined here are drawn from individual cases of SPS sensemaking of strategic public challenges. It is possible that SPS shift between these role conceptions (or indeed take on others) when faced with different situations. Wider evidence however suggests that people in social groups actively engage in 'identity work' to preserve their sense of unique identity, of which their role conceptions are an important component (Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003, Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep 2006).

Identity

SPS' identities are a key factor in their sensemaking, aligning these findings with leading scholars in the perspective, who place identity construction as a major foundation to sensemaking (Weick 1995, Gioia & Thomas 1996, Weick et al. 2005, Maclean et al. 2012). Three concepts of the aggregate dimension of the individual SPS' identity emerge in this data: her internalised role conception, discussed above; a personal, individual mission; and her reading of her personal standing.

An **individual mission** emerges as an important concept in SPS sensemaking. Many informants in this study express a general public service motivation that reflects locally-emphasized constituent values (Vandenabeele, Scheepers & Hondeghem 2006). The SPS who take leadership however also hold a sense of mission that extends beyond a generalised commitment to public service. In Mode A, SPS tend to make reference to a mission associated with their professional manager identity – about wanting to be a leader or a better public manager (24,28,33). In Mode B, however, SPS emphasize a more normative mission, expressed as important to the individual's expression of her identity, personal values and her motivation for being in the role. The personal missions proffered were all commitments to broad normative outcomes - such as equality, sustainability, tackling economic disadvantage, and devolution. In almost all cases, statements of mission emerged in interviews without prompting. An SPS' sense of mission potentially both edits and primes her sensemaking. In particular, while a personal sense of mission may complement the agenda of the elected government the individual is working for *most* of the time, there is a possibility of divergence between the two. As such, and as discussed in Chapter 7, an individual SPS's personal sense of mission may at times be in competition with the elected government's agenda: a sense of mission thus sits uneasily alongside the value of impartiality, which is central to the public service ethos (Du Gay 2009).

Independent standing is introduced as a new concept to capture an SPS' perception of her positioning in the network of social relationships in and around government, beyond the minister. In this data, an SPS' reading of her independent standing is a significant factor in her sensemaking pathway to leadership. This resonates with previously established evidence that

perceptions of external image are key to individual sensemaking and issue interpretation (Gioia & Thomas 1996, Brown, Stacey & Nandhakumar 2008). Independent standing is claimed in three main ways by SPS. As shown in Chapter 7, they refer to their individual or close team's reputation and relationships with important communities outside government such as academia, other governments, civic society (29, 33, 38); their external image as a professional established prior to joining government (7, 31); and in New Zealand, also by reference to the new legislative duty of stewardship (see logics of reform, above). These claims to independent standing are often made indirectly, and so do not immediately confront the daily norm of bureaucratic subservience to elected ministers. They nonetheless serve to suggest the individual SPS is recognised and valued across influential groups beyond her minister, affording her personal affirmation separate to her relationship with her minister. SPS feel independent standing is important to getting things done. In both research sites, the governments, and indeed society, are relatively small and 'your reputation goes well before you' (32). An SPS' reading of her independent standing – her interpretation of the image others hold of her – thus informs her projections about her own agency, and in particular her likely ability to influence others.

Noticing and framing

Noticing describes the sensemaking move in which a combination of mental models and salient cues attracts an individual's attention to a particular phenomenon from amongst the "almost infinite stream of events and inputs" that surrounds them (Weick et al. 2005, p.411). Noticing takes two distinct forms in Modes A and B. In Mode A, a politically-intense cue (discussed in 9.1.1

above) triggers SPS to notice, and towards a framing that there is sufficient, clear (unequivocal) ministerial direction to proceed into action. This is the routine mode of operating for those SPS, and triggers a sensemaking pathway fitting the definition of everyday sensemaking (Patriotta 2003).

In Mode B, however, noticing is cued by the SPS experiencing dissonance when she interprets **ministerial direction as equivocal**. Equivocality here is a subjective interpretation made by an SPS when she senses gaps in the directions provided by ministers, or the minister's framing is so incongruent with her own that the SPS does not accept it as plausible. Again, this finding reflects recent scholarship which argues that equivocality leads individuals to extract and interpret environmental cues and to deploy them to 'make sense' of occurrences and to enact their environment (Brown et al. 2015). I use the term 'equivocality' in recognition that action is also constitutive of sensemaking rather than simply an output of it: action shapes what it is that can be attended to "and in 'the doing' (Mangham & Pye 1991), shapes what is going on" (Colville et al. 2012, p.7). Clear ministerial direction reduces equivocality for an SPS because it focuses her attention and effort; where the minister affords more equivocal direction (in the SPS' interpretation), a space is generated into which alternative framings can be offered.

Framing typically constructs plausible clarity in a situation that is far from clear (Brown et al. 2015). Equivocality (ambiguity) is the norm in modern democratic governments, recognised not only by scholars (e.g., Noordegraaf 2007, March & Olsen 2010) but also SPS, as illustrated by this informant:

You are facing directly to the politicians and interpreting what they say and there, I think, the most important skill is the ability to listen, and to interpret, and then to be able to work with ambiguity... ministers are faced with so many

challenges and so many pressures coming from so many different directions that you will never get that sort of clarity and therefore, you have ambiguity... and therefore the most important skill, I think, for a senior public servant is to be comfortable with working with ambiguity (38)

Framing is therefore a vital, constitutive step to responding to strategic challenges in government. My analysis indicates two main framing concepts in the sensemaking pathway to SPS leadership. These are legitimacy, and the key locus of the challenge.

Legitimacy is perhaps the central framing consideration for SPS taking leadership, and it distinguishes Modes A and B. Here legitimacy can first be understood as a generalised perception of an action or agent as appropriate and desirable within locally-constructed norms (Suchman 1995). The invocation of legitimacy generates space for the SPS to exercise her agency, her power to direct action (Lukes, 1974). In organisational settings such exercising of power is often cloaked; “subtlety is its hallmark, because powerholders seldom flaunt their influence ability” (Frost 1987, cited by Gioia et al 1994). Moreover, within Westminster systems, the evolution of paradigms and norms discussed in Chapter 2 does not result in one coherent, accepted ‘rulebook’ of what is legitimate for SPS to do, and what is not; instead, it must be constantly interpreted (Rhodes et al. 2008, Peters 2009), offering an SPS an opportunity to construct a call to legitimacy that supports her actions.

In this study, the legitimacy claimed by SPS is found to be constitutional, managerial and/or sociological (values-based) (see also Terry 2015).

Constitutional legitimacy is represented in SPS’ sensemaking as deriving primarily from ministerial direction, which reflects the central Westminster system conventions of ministerial responsibility (Richards & Smith 2004, O’Toole 2006, Du Gay 2009) (see Chapter 2). This form of constitutional

legitimacy emerges as eminent, and affords the framework within which Mode A everyday sensemaking and leadership falls. It reflects Rhodes et al.'s (2008) finding that Westminster myths provide the dominant set of beliefs that bind civil servants.

SPS can however also try to assert constitutional legitimacy for action independent of ministers, by invoking the idea that the higher public service should act as a steadying power for the political system in the interests of good government; this convention was eschewed during the heyday of NPM but the introduction of the new duty of stewardship in New Zealand (see above) can be seen as presenting a modernized, more managerial, vision of the role of SPS not as guardians of a settled constitution (Hennessy 1989, Davis 2005, Du Gay 2009), as previously, but incorporating a responsibility to be trusted strategists charged to ensure preparedness of government and society for the future. Introduced in 2013, the duty of stewardship is very new and has not, yet, consolidated into routines or accepted practices. The idea of unelected public servants acting as a balancing power to elected ministers remains contested and continues to be debated today (Du Gay 2009, Rhodes 2014, du Gay 2015, Alford et al. 2016). The most widely and easily accepted constitutional legitimacy available to SPS therefore remains that derived from ministerial direction.

SPS in both modes A and B draw upon managerial and values-based considerations too. These add further layers of legitimacy to the framing the SPS is offering, supporting it with arguments of managerial effectiveness (3,17, 33) and value assertions too (12,17,31,32). Crucially, comparison of modes A and B sensemaking suggests that where SPS frame ministerial direction as

more equivocal, there is greater room for alternate framings, and the framings that SPS offer in this space draw more heavily on managerial and sociological legitimacy to compensate for the weaker claim they can make to constitutional legitimacy: arguments and inferences that a framing is both effective and in some way ‘the right thing to do’ become more important if they don’t have clear, full ministerial endorsement.

A further distinction that emerges is between claims that generate legitimacy to act, and those that generate legitimacy of the SPS’ personal agency. Again, both are more important to framing when ministerial direction is more equivocal (Mode B). SPS invoke **legitimacy of action** by reference to norms that are generally considered “desirable, proper, and appropriate” in their setting (Suchman 1995), combining appeals to constitutional, managerial and sociological legitimacy as are available to them. What emerges from the narrative accounts is also that, when ministerial direction is more equivocal (Mode B), SPS who take leadership need to assert the **legitimacy of their own agency** too; again they do so in managerial and sociological terms, as well as constitutional, drawing upon their personal standing, and/or their SPS role conception, as above. When diverging from a ministerial framing then, SPS anticipate contest and create framings that position not only their responding actions as appropriate, but that also suggest it is appropriate for *them* to act too.

The second framing concept important to SPS taking leadership is the **locus of the challenge**. I define the locus of the challenge as the arena in which the SPS interprets action in response to the challenge should take place. This concept draws on Heifetz (1994, 2006) and Hartley & colleagues (Hartley & Benington 2011, Hartley 2012, Stansfield 2016). Hartley & colleagues suggest

that public (and political) leadership takes place across an array of arenas, which can be understood as:

“... “not only about physical spaces” but about “social process of mutual influence between a variety of stakeholders . . . as spaces and flows of people, ideas, problems, legitimacy and resources” (Hartley & Benington, 2011, p. 211, cited in (Stansfield 2016, p.5)

Heifetz (2006), expounding his theory of adaptive leadership, highlights that the arena a leader defines as the locus for a challenge shapes the actions she then engages in, and which she promotes to others. Broadly, SPS frame the locus of a strategic challenge they are facing in two ways: as a delivery system challenge, or as a governance challenge. A delivery locus is revealed in framings that concentrate on operationalizing the system (24), being interventionist in the system (29, 33), and the state of readiness of delivery partners (12). Those offering a governance framing locate the challenge not just in public services but in society and in government (9, 21) or even in constitutional arrangements (38). How individuals frame the locus of the challenge influences where they spend their attention when it comes to responding. The locus of the challenge thus primes some knowledge and practices over others, affording temporary clarity but also attracting the risk that the individual notices fewer cues and ignores even more (Weber & Glynn 2006, Weick 2012).

Responding: taking leadership

Finally, I define the responding practices described in the narrative accounts of Mode A and Mode B sensemaking. In line with many practice theorists, I suggest practices, as the everyday activities of organizing in both routine and improvised forms, are constitutive of organisational reality in government and

central to governmental outcomes (Feldman and Orlikowski 2011, Kaplan 2008). I have already argued that both clusters of practices also meet the definition of leadership-in-government provided by t'Hart (2014) as relational, embracing the full range of activities engaged in by post-holders within public organisations *to influence* others' actions, values and beliefs. They are a product of both 'non-deliberate practical coping' as well as, at times, some 'planned, intentional action' (Chia & Holt 2006, p. 643).

I suggest that the cluster of practices in Mode A can be understood as agenda leadership. **Agenda leadership** represents a pattern of practices that coalesce around delivering a government commitment: leading and designing a strategic response; externally, being the face of the agenda for stakeholders; internally, challenging one's own organisation to change; and, delivery-focussed reporting to ministers. Agenda leadership has a managerial character, emphasizing the professional management over policy or technical expertise (Hood 1991) in SPS describing activities and techniques such as developing proposals, baselining, participating in boards and steering groups, establishing or restructuring functions, managing teams, and coordinating (with) delivery partners. It is focussed on achieving change in the short to medium term, exemplified both by these techniques, and by an emphasis on action in their reporting and discussions with ministers. In cases of agenda leadership, then, a primary function of the SPS is to deliver the elected government's agenda, often drawing on private sector practices, tools and techniques when doing so (Matheson et al. 1997).

Agenda leadership however diverges from the classic managerialism associated with New Public Management (Hood 1991, Pollitt & Bouckaert 2011)

in two ways. First, greater attention is paid to driving change through a wider set of partners, including third sector and private organisations, as well as traditional delivery agencies (health trusts, local government, etc). This is reflected in the SPS acting as the face of the (change) agenda, and in some spreading of attention across internal and external arenas. Second, for SPS the practice of delivery-focussed ministerial reporting is done in person as well as in writing, and can involve two-way debate about the means of delivery – a very different practice to the management reporting done by ‘new public managers’ in arms-length government agencies responding to distantly-set performance metrics (Horton & Jones 1996, Ferlie et al. 2008). Agenda leadership connects closely to the ‘professional manager’ role conception.

By contrast to the managerially-orientated practices of agenda leadership, the responding described in Mode B sensemaking comprises a set of practices that centre around influencing. I label this pattern of responding **steward leadership**. I derive the label from a view of leadership in the public realm as relational in which influencing is core (Hartley & Benington 2011, t'Hart 2014), and because these practices are deployed where SPS are operating beyond unequivocal ministerial direction. There is an implicit greater leaning in steward leadership practices towards notions of trust and reciprocity, an interpretation of relationships that is not solely professional or rational (Andresani and Ferlie 2006). It also deliberately reflects the term ‘stewardship’ which I have demonstrated as influential on Mode B sensemaking and leadership in New Zealand. I define steward leadership, as captured by this study, as the practices associated with a modernized vision of the role of an SPS as incorporating a responsibility to be trusted strategists charged to ensure preparedness of government and society for the future. In the data, the key dominant logics of

reform informing steward leadership (indirectly) are stewardship and the connected, strategic management rooted, logics of systems thinking and (emergent) future-orientation. In steward leadership mode, SPS practices converge around actively engaging in framing contests (Kaplan 2008), seeking to convert their own cognitive frame of a strategic challenge into the predominant frame within their own organisations and the wider delivery system. As the narrative account of Mode B relates, they seek to convert their ministers' framings and wider systems thinking via a variety of types of engagement – including occasionally entering civic debate themselves. SPS describe creating sufficient ministerial permission to allow them to act, but the impetus to act rests with them, often individually, rather than with the elected minister(s). Alongside personally seeking to influence government thinking, they also realign at least some of the resources at their disposal – within their own teams or organisations – to support them.

This concept of steward leadership draws in part upon Terry's (1998, 2003) seminal treatise on the administrative leader as conservator but also the idea of anticipatory governance (Boston 2017). Terry (2003) called for a restoration of trust in senior administrative leaders in government to "protect and maintain administrative institutions in a manner that promotes or is consistent with constitutional processes, values, and beliefs" (p. 24). SPS in this study act beyond ministerial authority to respond to strategic challenges they believe need to be addressed; the prominent attention they give legitimacy shows they do so with attention to constitutional and social norms, though perhaps not specifically with the aim of protecting the constitution. Instead, the purpose of steward leadership is better understood through the prism of the – itself evolving – concept of anticipatory governance drawn from technoscience

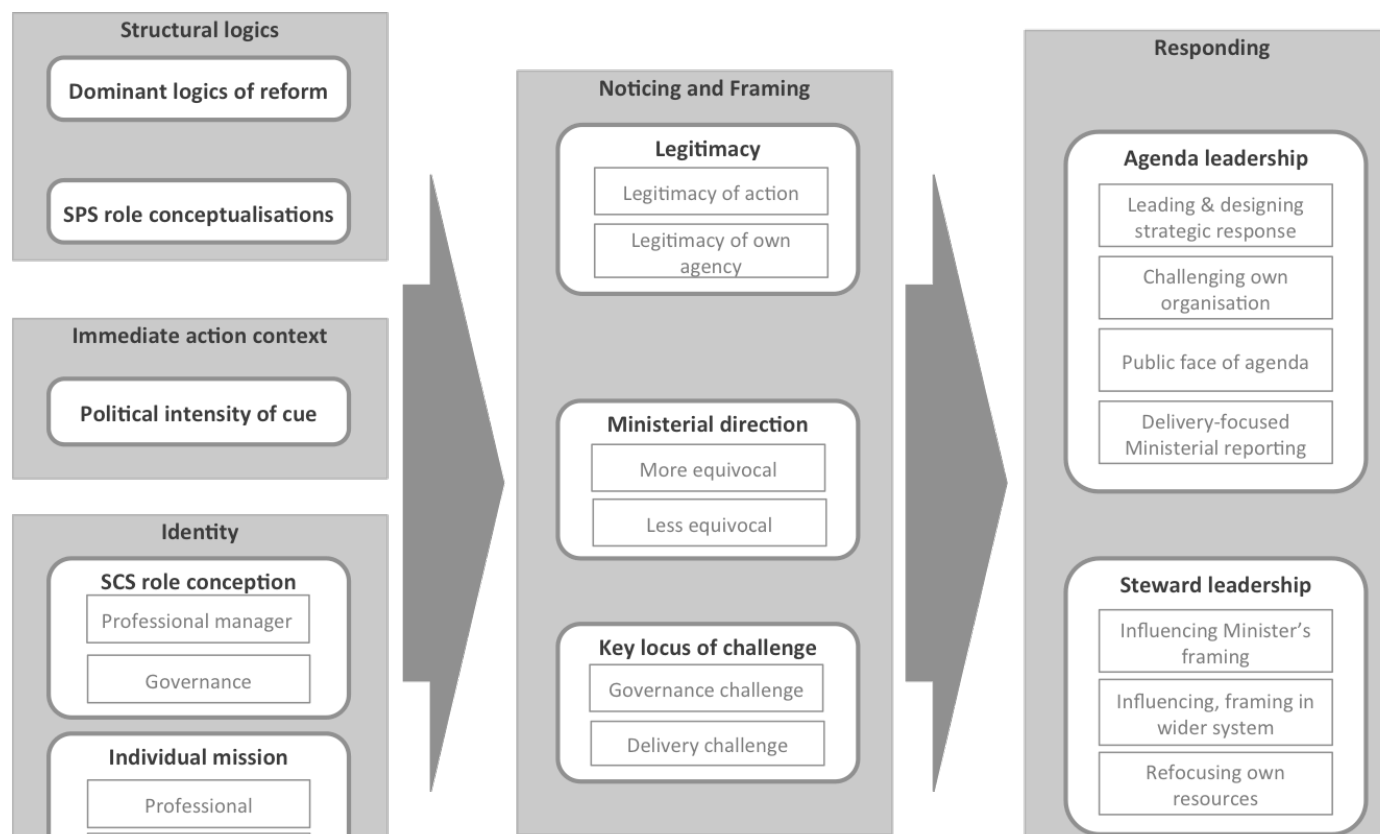
(Guston 2014). Reacting to the short-termism inherent in democratic electoral cycles, Boston (2017) calls for reforms to enable the (New Zealand) governance system collectively to act in the long-term national interest. He describes anticipatory governance in ten attributes: as forward-looking, vigilant, proactive, holistic and systems-oriented, embedding long-term interests in day-to-day decision-making, fostering resilience and sustainability, participatory, and adaptive (Boston, 2017, p.72). For Boston (2017), SPS must not only help ensure ministers govern within constitutional conventions and maintain stability today, but seek to enable them to govern for the long-term, too – aiming for the ten attributes listed. So, steward leadership, as it is emerging, contains expectations that SPS will both maintain constitutional stability *and* act as agents for change towards longer-term policy-making.

Steward leadership is an evolving and emergent set of practices, influenced by these ideas but not, yet at least, fulfilling them. Practically, a number of SPS describe a need to be opportunistic in steward leadership mode (17, 32) because the majority of their time and resources are required for leadership of strategic agendas agreed by ministers (agenda leadership); tackling challenges that are outside or to the periphery of ministers' interests must be done with the remaining personal energy and resources at their disposal. Steward leadership is enacted only for challenges the SPS feel are very important – indicated by their willingness to invest time and energy without clear ministerial support – but to which they struggle to attract resources. As a result, and as observed by this informant, steward leadership tends to be '...emergent, I would say, as opposed to well planned' (21).

Mapping pathways between the key concepts

Now having instantiated the ten constituent second-order concepts of my model, my next task is to specify the relationships among these concepts that explain the sensemaking pathways that lead SPS to either agenda leadership or steward leadership, as the two forms of SPS leadership uncovered by this study. Figure 8.2, below, presents these key concepts and their relationships in general form. In particular, it shows that intrinsic concepts of identity, as well as extrinsic logics, influence all three sensemaking moves of noticing, framing and responding; and equivocality in ministerial direction acts as a fulcrum between agenda leadership and steward leadership. To convey these relationships in more depth, I move to present the second layer of my inductive model, and the sensemaking pathways that connect my central concepts.

Figure 9.2
Integrated emergent model



The emphasis of this study is to examine why SPS take leadership, through an examination of sensemaking concepts and pathways. Below, I therefore concentrate on the pathways to framing, and from framing to responding, in the form of either agenda leadership or steward leadership as the two forms of leadership uncovered by this study. I acknowledge that SPS' enacted leadership itself has a reciprocal influence on the environment, and produce "structures, constraints, and opportunities that were not there before they took action" (Weick 1988, p.306). SPS' framing of the challenge itself and framing of action are almost always interwoven, which suggests that how they interpret challenges is also edited by their pre-existing action (responding) preferences. Here, with the focus on how SPS leadership is itself accomplished, such influences are shown as antecedents. (Examining the influence of SPS' enacted leadership was beyond the scope of this study, and was not supported by its cross-sectional design).

Mode A: sensemaking pathways to agenda leadership

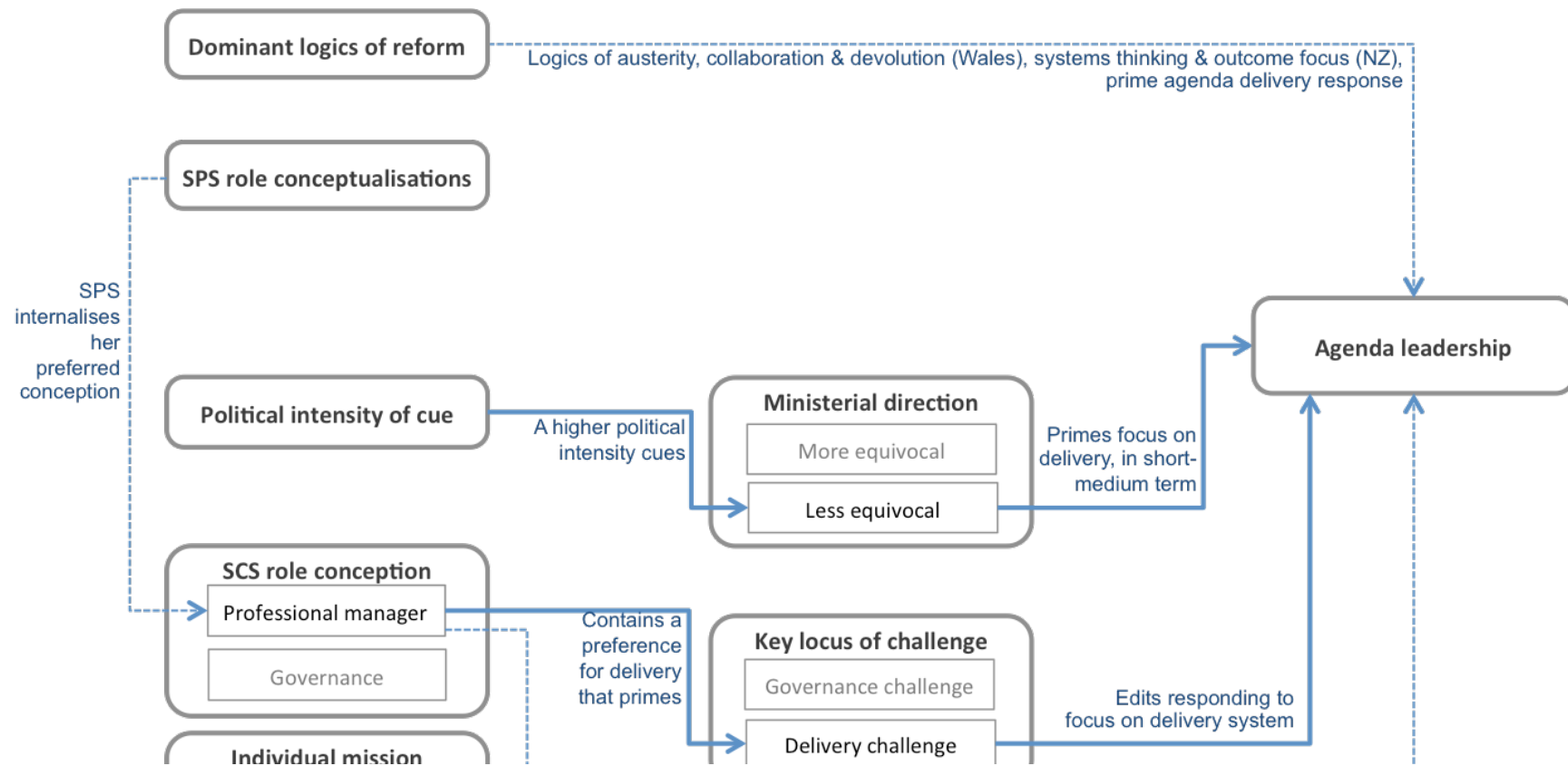
Figure 9.3 shows graphically the typical sensemaking pathways that enact and enable SPS agenda leadership in response to strategic challenges. My analysis reveals two main pathways to agenda leadership. First, SPS sensemaking is triggered by a politically-intense cue; owing to the political intensity, ministerial direction is less equivocal, priming a response that emphasises delivery of the agenda in the short to medium -term. As the Mode A narrative suggests, this seems to reflect the reality of much SPS sensemaking: day-to-day, governments face multiple, competing demands for action on strategic challenges, and ministers want to respond to those demands, ideally enabling them to demonstrate they have delivered some specific change rapidly, in face

of scrutiny. In parallel, the SPS' role conception, identifying her as a professional manager, contains a preference for delivery which primes her to frame the locus of the challenge as lying within the public service system, which in turn leads her to focus her responding toward that arena.

These main pathways are reinforced by three further pathways. The preference for delivery contained in the SPS' professional manager role conception also primes an agenda leadership response: she sees it as her role to translate her minister's direction into action, demanding not just development of a strategy but also managing it through to implementation. How she does so is edited by her professional mission: her identity as an economist, for example, orientates her towards the practices, tools and techniques of economics. Key dominant logics of reform also prime and edit agenda leadership practices: the logics of austerity, collaboration and devolution in Wales, and systems thinking and outcome focus in New Zealand, orientate the SPS towards practices associated with the reform of public service delivery systems rather than towards ideas of societal or governance change.

Table A.1 in Appendix A provides representative evidence of the patterns described above for sensemaking pathways to agenda leadership. It displays linked representative quotations from each research site, together affording insight into example cases. The complete data structure table, affording further examples, is also available as Table A.3.

Figure 9.3
Mode A sensemaking pathways to agenda leadership



Mode B: sensemaking pathways to steward leadership

The second pattern I identify is a set of sensemaking pathways that enable and enact SPS steward leadership, as a distinct pattern of leadership practices in response to strategic challenges. Figure 8.4 shows the archetypal sensemaking pathways for SPS who take steward leadership; again, representative connected quotations illustrating these pathways are provided in Table A.2 in Appendix A, and more examples can be found in the detailed data tables in Table A.3.

Sensemaking enabling and enacting steward leadership is cued by the SPS experiencing dissonance triggered by a perception of equivocality of ministerial direction. When there is less political intensity around a challenge, SPS have more space and time to engage in scanning, and are more likely to perceive gaps in ministerial direction; however an SPS may experience incongruence between her and her minister's framing in both politically intense and less intense situations.

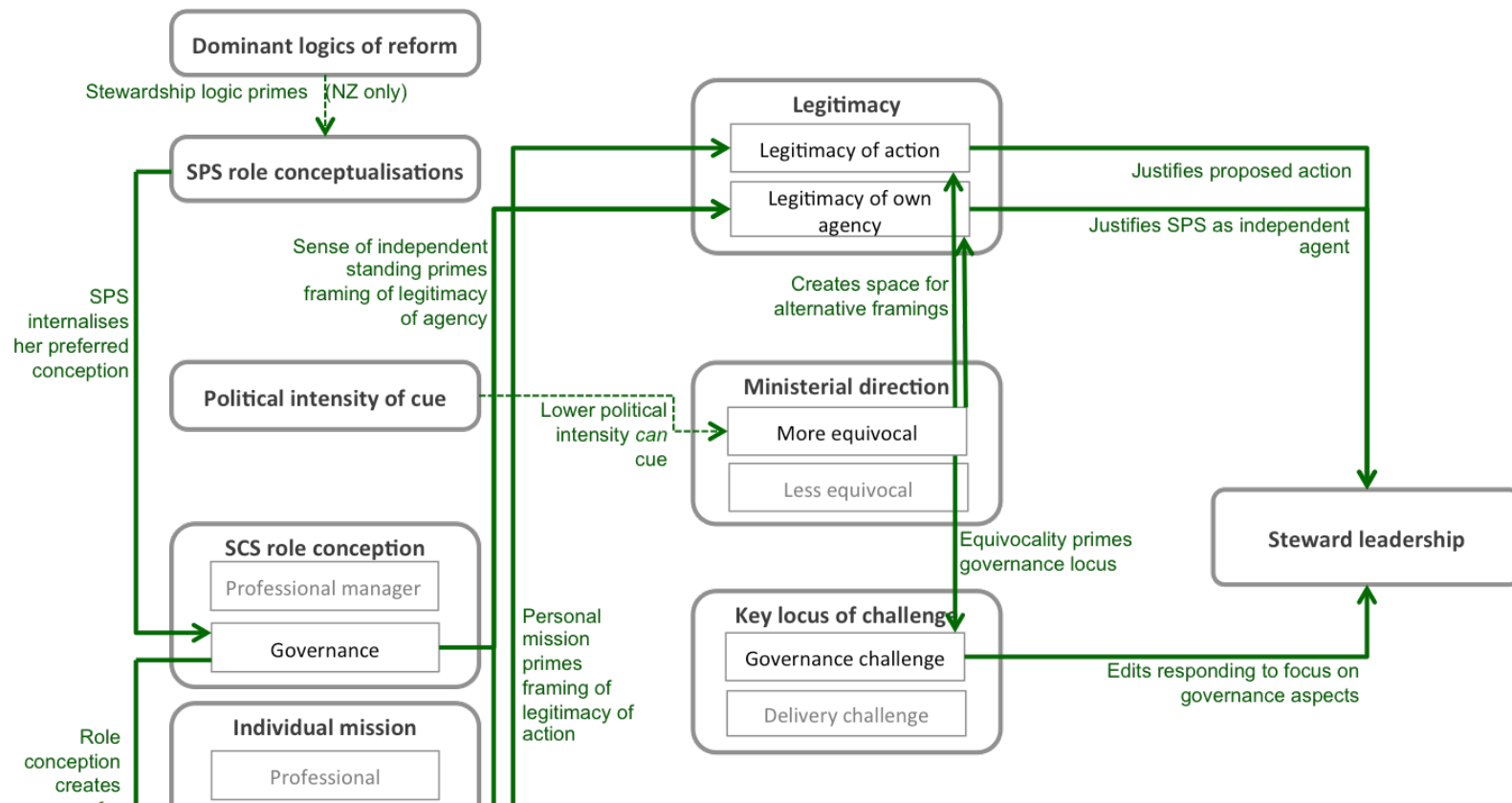
The key sensemaking pathway triggered by equivocality of ministerial direction navigates through the central framing concern of legitimacy. In the absence of clear constitutional legitimacy afforded by unequivocal ministerial direction, the SPS asserts her framing of the strategic challenge, and her own agency, as independently legitimate. She does so by justifying both in terms of generally-accepted norms of what is managerially and socially right to do. Crucially, the framing of what is managerially and socially right is intrinsic, primed by her own personal mission (e.g., a personal passion for equality). Equally, she legitimises her autonomy from the minister by drawing on a governance role conception

that affords SPS a degree of independent power (e.g., the logic of stewardship in New Zealand), and/or by reference to her independent standing amongst stakeholders beyond the minister.

In parallel, equivocality in the minister's direction combines with the SPS' governance role conception to prime the SPS to frame the strategic challenge in governance terms: the locus of the challenge lies in the arenas of political governance or society, in which competing framings, and the values and relationships underpinning them, must be negotiated before responding can meaningfully begin.

Framing her proposed action and agency as legitimate, and the challenge as a governance challenge, together prime the SPS to engage in steward leadership practices. She engages in framing contests, seeking to convert her personal frame of the challenge into a shared frame, through engagement with wider colleagues and stakeholders, as well as her minister. She also aligns at least some of the resources she has at her disposal beyond direct ministerial authority to support her. If she spreads her frame of the challenge, she creates sufficient consensus for her frame to become dominant and via ministerial direction, to shift her own sensemaking and leadership practices from Mode B to the more everyday pattern of Mode A.

Figure 9.4
Mode B sensemaking pathways to steward leadership



Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have sought to construct a process model that explains how SPS leadership is accomplished. I have followed a highly systematized approach in an effort to render the construction process transparent, and trustworthy. At the core of this process has been the data structure, which seeks to show how the first-order constructs constitute the second-order concepts, and in turn how the second-order concepts constitute the aggregate categories. The data structure is represented graphically in Figure 9.1, and in summary and full form in Appendix A. I then sought to offer precision in defining the relationships between the concepts – the heart of the model – through the discipline of presenting them graphically, first as an emergent model (Figure 9.2) and then mapping the detailed sensemaking pathways (Figures 9.3 and 9.4).

In sum, both agenda leadership and steward leadership are important responses to strategic challenges. The process model however reveals that SPS are enacting very different sensemaking paths in these two modes. The key differences stem from the interpretation of equivocality of ministerial direction and divergent legitimacy claims made, which draw upon competing logics, preferences and interpretations of SPS identity - which then lead to distinct patterns of leadership practices.

I established in Chapter 2 that while a strong argument is made for leadership in government by permanent professionals below those in elected office (Van Wart 2003, Van Wart 2012, t'Hart 2014, Vogel & Masal 2015), contrary voices raise serious concerns about the impact of unelected actors exercising

leadership on the constitutional legitimacy of democracies, and especially on the mutable Westminster settlement (Terry 2003, Meier & O'Toole 2006, Du Gay 2009). I characterised this debate as pitting concerns for government effectiveness against concerns for democratic integrity. My interim discussions of the findings in Chapters 7 and 8 began to consider the implications for this debate. I highlighted that SPS' sensemaking and leadership practices show them to be exercising agency independent of ministers, enabled not just by invocations to constitutional legitimacy but also by broader values. I return to this, and other constitutional and operational implications, in my integrative discussion chapter, next.

Chapter 10 Discussion

In Chapters 7, 8 and 9, my findings have revealed the individual sensemaking pathways that enable and constitute SPS leadership. I have presented the findings in the form of ideal-type narrative accounts, and then in the form of an emergent model, that has mapped key concepts and pathways between them.

My purpose in this discussion chapter is to revisit the key findings of the thesis, showing how they address the study's aim and research questions, and contribute new knowledge to existing debates. First, I take stock of the findings in an integrative summary, mapping them to my original research questions. Second, I have deliberately drawn upon the theoretical and methodological tools of the sensemaking perspective as relatively rare to public administration, to help me afford fresh insight into the field by humanising SPS leadership, and focussing on sensemaking as constructive of SPS' social world. I therefore dedicate the majority of this chapter to discussing the implications of these findings for the public administration debate on the role of SPS in Westminster systems of government.

I ground the discussion in the humanisation of SPS leadership. Then, I set out my argument that the sensemaking and leadership pathways revealed here clarify the risk that is posed by SPS leadership to the constitutional integrity of Westminster system governments. I discuss the implications of this evidence, and propose a way forward that might help address the two competing concerns that characterise the current situation, namely the concern for greater government effectiveness (which is perceived to require more SPS leadership) and the concern for democratic integrity (see Denis, 2005, Van Wart 2017, Du

Gay 2009, O'Reilly & Reed 2011). Finally, I reflect on the operational risks of everyday sensemaking for SPS leadership, and identify how SPS' human shortcomings brought into focus by this study's sensemaking lens might be mitigated.

It is a developing tradition for authors of empirical sensemaking studies to frame their discussions with a reflexive acknowledgment that they too are engaged in constructing meaning, just as their participants have been (for examples, see Orlikowski & Gash 1994; Weick 2001; Brown 2000; Brown 2008; Mills 2010; Sandberg & Tsouskas 2014). This is indeed the case here, and this chapter does represent my own sensemaking about the array of findings presented in Chapters 7, 8 and 9. Moreover, my sensemaking has been a conscious activity, a real effort to step back from the data and to reflect not only on 'what is going on here?' (Weick 1995) but also to answer 'so what?' questions, in terms of making a theoretical contribution that is also relevant to practitioners (Pettigrew 2005, Corley & Gioia 2011).

Integrative summary of findings

The questions that guided this research were designed to channel curiosity not only about *what* and *how* SPS take leadership, but also about *why* they do so – acknowledging that the *why* question is usually the most fruitful but also the most difficult avenue of theory development (Whetten 1989). The research questions are repeated here:

RQ1: What are the sensemaking pathways that lead to individual SPS taking leadership in response to strategic public challenges?

A: Are patterns discernable across the steps of the pathway - noticing, framing and responding?

B: Which factors influence SPS sensemaking when taking leadership, and how?

RQ2: What, if any, are the constitutional or operational implications of these findings?

In this study, I conceptualise leadership by permanent, senior public servants in Westminster system governments. I inductively identify two sensemaking pathways that lead to, and constitute, SPS engaging in two distinct clusters of leadership practices: Mode A enabling and constituting agenda leadership, and Mode B enabling and constituting steward leadership (RQ1.A). Both meet the definition of leadership-in-government provided by t'Hart (2014) as embracing the full range of activities engaged in by post-holders within public organisations *to influence* others' actions, values and beliefs. This study therefore firstly demonstrates that many SPS do employ practices, such as shaping strategic thinking, directing programmes and acting as the public face of an agenda, that are recognisable as leadership beyond the rarefied confines of national government departments.

Importantly, however, as reported in Chapter 7, not all SPS' responding takes the form of leadership practices. A number of informants (ranging across all SPS grades but skewed to those at the lower tiers) instead respond to strategic challenges with a pattern of practices that cluster around supporting others to act. The 'others' they support are typically ministers, and the SPS' public servant managers (often the CEO of the department or equivalent). These SPS seem to be enacting a follower, rather than a leader, role in the context of a collectively constructed leadership process (Uhl-Bien 2006); the sensemaking

path(s) that lead to and constitute this SPS-as-follower role were however not the focus of this study, and remain a potentially interesting avenue for future research. Here, the important contribution these cases make is simpler. They demonstrate that the leadership practices uncovered by this study are not universal across SPS: the SPS in this study all *select* leadership practices, based on their framings of the challenges in hand, which are in turn informed by extrinsic factors and intrinsic preferences. In sum, leadership practices are an option for SPS, rather than a foregone conclusion.

Second, I distinguish two clusters of SPS leadership practices - agenda leadership and steward leadership - which are generated by two distinct sensemaking pathways. I find that both agenda leadership and steward leadership are present in both the New Zealand and Wales contexts, suggesting they are relevant to both sites as democratic, Westminster system governments. Mode A sensemaking and agenda leadership can be understood as everyday sensemaking (Patriotta & Brown 2011), whereas Mode B sensemaking and steward leadership are rarer. This asymmetry between the two modes and associated patterns of leadership practices is borne out by feedback from informants, and by the number of cases of modes A and B in the study.

A major difference between Mode A and agenda leadership, and Mode B and steward leadership, is the dissonance generated for the SPS by a perception of equivocality in the minister's direction in Mode B which leads to legitimacy becoming the central concern of Mode B sensemaking. Equivocality opens the way for alternative framings to be generated (see also Weick et al. 2005, Brown et al. 2015); however in the context of Westminster governments, which are

saturated with reified customs and norms (Rhodes 2005), it is understandable that SPS are sensitive to the appropriateness of their action, and their agency, when they move beyond the routine mode of fulfilling ministerial wishes. The risk of being perceived to respond inappropriately is likely further encouragement to SPS to prefer the accepted everyday Mode A sensemaking and agenda leadership.

Modes A and B are distinct sensemaking pathways that lead to and constitute SPS leadership, but they are not intended to categorise individuals. The cross-sectional design of the study, and the focus on single case examples of individual SPS sensemaking in response to strategic challenges, means that no conclusions about individuals' practices over time, or in different situations, should be drawn. Indeed, whether and how often SPS shift between Modes A and B, or indeed in and out of leadership altogether, requires further analysis beyond this study. A few informants revealed evidence of moving from Mode A to Mode B over a period of years; however, most informants afforded one relatively short-term case example of their sensemaking in the face of a strategic challenge. This may suggest that individual SPS may adapt their leadership practices in response to different contextual factors; however other research suggests that identity factors such as role conception and personal mission tend towards stability (Gioia 1998), and the prominence of these factors in the sensemaking pathways to SPS leadership might logically indicate that SPS' preferred sensemaking modes should be relatively stable even when external conditions change. At this stage, then, it is important to acknowledge that SPS may shift between Modes A and B and to note that the cues that trigger adaption warrant further study.

Finding two modes of SPS sensemaking and leadership also attracts the inevitable question of whether one mode is 'better' than the other. As inductive research, this study cannot answer such a normative / deductive question. 'Which is better?' is also, I submit, the wrong question at this stage. Instead, it is important to acknowledge that both agenda leadership and steward leadership are real phenomena. So if SPS leadership is acknowledged to be happening, it is important instead to understand *how* and *why* it takes place (RQ1.B) in order to make a practice-relevant theoretical contribution (Whetten 1989). Through this study, I identify two sets of factors with significant implications: the extrinsic factors of role conceptualisations and dominant logics of reform; and the intrinsic factors of the individual's role conception, mission and standing.

Extrinsic factors have significant influence on SPS sensemaking and leadership, as the pathways in Chapter 9 illustrate graphically. For example, in Mode A (everyday sensemaking) the SPS' framings of unequivocal ministerial direction, and the locus of the challenge as lying in the public service delivery system, all draw upon a 'professional manager' role conception; in Mode B, the SPS draws on a 'governance' role conception to assert her legitimacy and standing independent of the minister. These role conceptions derive from extrinsic role conceptualisations associated with different public administration paradigms, as shown in Chapter 2, but in combination. The professional manager role conception for example draws on both the New Public Management 'manager' role conceptualisation and aspects of the 'leader' role conception more closely connected to more recent governance paradigms. So, SPS access different role conceptualisations selectively. This is mirrored in their accessing of dominant logics of reform; for example, while the local dominant logic of stewardship was utilized by many SPS in New Zealand to legitimise

their own agency, it was not present in every SPS sensemaking pathway. So SPS can also be understood to draw upon different dominant logics to support their sensemaking too. These findings confirm Lodge & Gill's (2011) observation of a layering of institutional norms as public administration paradigms have evolved (from Traditional Public Administration, to New Public Management, to the competing governance paradigms of the 2010s). Crucially, this layering of paradigms, and especially of extrinsic role conceptualisations, generates significant interpretive space for SPS.

The findings reveal that alongside extrinsic factors, SPS sensemaking is shaped by SPS' own identities too - here, captured in three concepts of intrinsic role conception, individual mission (*'why I'm here and where I came from'*), and independent standing (*'we have a role independent of the current government'*). While an SPS' identity influences sensemaking in both modes, it is especially evident in Mode B when SPS' sensemaking and leadership practices diverge from ministerial direction. Sensing equivocality in her minister's directions, the SPS draws upon her personal mission and independent sense of standing to frame the challenges and her selection of leadership practices. So, in Mode B sensemaking is clearly driven by an SPS' individual values-based mission and sense of independent standing in opposition to, or absence of, ministerial direction leading to her generating a framing of the challenge that contests the minister's and to leadership practices which promote that framing. This study therefore affords empirical evidence not only that SPS' identities and preferences at times fundamentally influence their leadership actions - but also how.

So SPS leadership is here understood as constituted by individual practices engaged in by SPS. These practices are optional, meaning that SPS leadership is possible but other responding practices are open to them. SPS leadership is found to take two forms, of agenda leadership and steward leadership, which are each enabled by a particular pattern of individual sensemaking, Modes A and B respectively. Mode A and agenda leadership can be understood as everyday sensemaking pathways; whereas Mode B sensemaking and steward leadership are rarer, triggered by the SPS perceiving equivocality in her minister's directions, and are more difficult for SPS who must address legitimacy as a central concern. There is some evidence of SPS shifting between modes, but this is an avenue for future investigation. SPS sensemaking and leadership are shown to be influenced by both extrinsic role conceptualisations and logics, and by intrinsic factors of individual identity.

Humanising SPS leadership

I now turn to discuss two implications of these findings that spring from the application of a sensemaking lens to the phenomenon of SPS leadership (RQ2). One, I argue that the SPS sensemaking pathways presented in this study confirm that key Westminster system conventions are myths, and clarify the potential risk of SPS leadership to democratic and constitutional integrity; I point to investment in SPS socialisation, and revision of accountability and scrutiny routines, as potential steps to counter this risk. Two, I examine the operational implications of everyday sensemaking and suggest that strategies to support 'doubting' and 'editing' (Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010) may offer

significant potential to improve SPS' everyday sensemaking - and leadership - in government.

The foundation upon which this discussion is offered is the humanisation of government afforded by taking a practice-based sensemaking view (Weick 1979, Jarzabkowski 2005). In this study I regard government, as a type of organisation, as constituted by practices - by what people actually do (Feldman & Orlikowski 2011, Nicolini 2012). More accurately then, *governing* is constituted of *doings* of actors. I focus on *leading* as a particular category of doing, and on a particular under-researched actor, the senior public servant. To paraphrase Boden (1994) and Brown et al. (2015), my approach sees the practical activities of SPS engaged in concrete social situations of leading as (some) building blocks of social reality, and thus also as building blocks for (bounded) theorizing.

Accordingly, I have undertaken detailed empirical research in order to understand SPS leadership practices as they are enacted, and the sensemaking processes and other factors that mediate them (Miettinen et al. 2009). My practice-based sensemaking view has sensitised my data gathering and analysis to how knowledge is constituted and reconstituted in the everyday practices of leadership, and to the dynamics of power inherent to activity in the social world of government. It has afforded methodological tools – such as the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al. 2013), which underpins my research design – as well as conceptual tools, such as the framework of noticing, framing and responding (Weick 1995, Maitlis & Christianson 2014), and the concepts of framing contests (Kaplan 2008) and structural logics (Weber & Glynn 2006) which were invaluable in the abductive stage of developing this study's

emergent model. These foundations underpin the study's findings and model, and enable the following insights.

Constitutional implications: SPS leadership and the Westminster system

In Chapter 3, I observed that SPS leadership is constitutionally problematic in Westminster settings. Leadership emphasizes individuals over institutions (du Gay 2009), encourages the individual leader to take their own normative judgements (Rhodes & Wanna 2007), and reifies delivery (Terry 2015). In the Westminster system of government however, convention holds that SPS are neutral, impartial, permanent members of the bureaucracy (Richards & Smith 2016) who serve ministers, conducting themselves with integrity and with central regard to the public's expectations of fairness and justice (Chapman & O'Toole 2010). I now reflect on the consequences of my findings for each of the three key tensions highlighted in Chapter 3, in turn.

Individual vs. shared leadership. The tension between viewing SPS leadership as individual or shared with ministers is fuelled by divergent normative priorities amongst scholars. On the one side are those who believe SPS engaging in more or better individual leadership is key to improving (primarily) operational services and outcomes (e.g., Trottier et al. 2008, Van Wart 2013, Berman et al. 2017); on the other are those who believe that the integrity of the Westminster system is risked by empowering public servants to lead (act) independently of ministers (e.g., Chapman & O'Toole, 2010; O'Reilly & Reed 2011).

This study demonstrates that, whatever normative view one may hold, individual SPS leadership *is* happening. It shows a cohort of SPS in the

Westminster system governments of New Zealand and Wales who take leadership, and whose identities and preferences shape that leadership – influencing what they notice, how they frame it and the leadership practices they enact. The findings reveal SPS to be independent leaders in government, whose meaning-making has real strategic implications (see also, Kaplan 2008).

I therefore suggest my findings confirm that the central Westminster convention of the indivisibility of the political and administrative élite is a myth (Rhodes et al. 2008, Richards & Smith 2016). This convention frames the minister-SPS relationship as “a symbiotic partnership” in which SPS and ministers have a “shared personality” (Richards & Smith 2016, p.501-502), and within which SPS exercise power in ministers’ names, because they do so to deliver upon their wishes (Du Gay 2009). The sensemaking pathways in Modes A and B however show that SPS bring their own role conceptions and individual value missions to bear on their sensemaking and leadership in response to strategic challenges. Ministerial wishes, captured here as ministerial direction, continue to be significant in shaping SPS activity but *are not the only factor*. As such, while SPS work closely with ministers, their sensemaking and leadership are more accurately captured as individual, rather than shared – and the Westminster convention of indivisible shared leadership is inaccurate, a myth.

To an extent this accords with Rhodes (2005) and Grube & Howard (2016) who both observe that SPS act *as if* Westminster conventions were enforced realities. Public servants, Grube & Howard (2016) suggest, “retain very clear ideas on what the Westminster tradition requires of them when the pressure is on” (p.477). They imply that Westminster conventions are the major constraint on SPS agency and sensemaking, even today when newer paradigms and role

conceptions are proven to offer alternative norms and ideals. This study's findings however query this latter point, instead showing that SPS interpret legitimacy to include Westminster conventions – and the prominence of ministerial direction to noticing and framing shows Westminster conventions are central – but that SPS also draw upon managerial and sociological sources of legitimacy when they choose to diverge from ministerial direction. So Westminster conventions today compete with notions of what is managerially and socially appropriate in SPS sensemaking (which themselves vary according to local conditions, as the difference in dominant logics in New Zealand and Wales evidences). I suggest this broadening of what is taken into account when interpretations of appropriateness and legitimacy are made by SPS signals a decentring of constitutional legitimacy and a weakening of Westminster conventions.

Defining SPS as individual actors exercising their own agency within a sensemaking framework in which Westminster norms hold weaker influence then raises the question of the purposes for which they use that agency. In the context of government, the greatest concern is whether they use their agentic power to pursue the public good, or alternatively their own interests (Hood & Lodge 2006, Lodge & Hood 2012) or those of favoured groups (La Palombara 1967, Peters 2002). This study aligns with the assessment offered by Alford et al. (2016) that when exercising leadership independent of ministers, SPS seem to do so for public purposes rather than self-interest; SPS do not seek to lead on challenges in a way completely at odds to their ministers' agendas, but seek to either deliver it, or to shift the minister's agenda incrementally towards their preferred interpretation of the best response to the challenge in hand. SPS, then, seem to seek to wield power with constructive intent and in a manner

contained by locally prevalent structural norms; in doing so, they reproduce (or may marginally adapt) the existing structural conditions and social order (Archer 1995). Private interests were not discussed during my fieldwork. However, the study draws on SPS' own self-narratives gathered through interviews, in which a desire for positive self-representation was almost certainly a factor (Goffman 1978, Maclean et al. 2012); any conclusion on SPS' motivations for leadership drawn on this study alone must therefore remain tentative.

The contribution of this study to the normative argument on whether SPS should engage in individual or shared leadership is thus not to resolve the tension but to offer the empirical findings that show, whether or not one believes SPS leadership *should* be happening, it *is*: (a) SPS operate as individual leaders who work closely with but independently of ministers, and (b) SPS leadership today is legitimated by calls to managerial and social norms, and not just by reference to the constitutional norms of the Westminster system. Both these factors underscore that the Westminster convention of indivisibility of minister and SPS is a myth. This links to the second tension in the literature, which centres on whether changes to the SPS role conceptualisation and public service ethos are resulting in the decline or modernisation of the Westminster system.

Decline vs. modernisation. The debate on decline and modernisation centres first on whether the public services ethos of (senior) public servants is viewed as being eroded (Chapman 1992, O'Toole 2006, du Gay 2015) or simply adapted (Brereton & Temple 1999, Horton 2006, Pyper & Burnham 2011). At the heart of the public service ethos lies the convention of public servant

independence, comprising objectivity and impartiality, alongside political neutrality and integrity (Du Gay 2002, O'Toole 2006).

The findings here however reveal an array of influences on SPS sensemaking and leadership, which I suggest raise a fundamental question about SPS' claim on impartiality and objectivity. SPS draw upon extrinsic logics (especially dominant logics of reform) and intrinsic identity factors (role conceptions, individual missions and a sense of independent standing) as they generate plausible meanings of strategic challenges. Further, while there are many instances in the study of SPS being conscious of such influences on their sensemaking (e.g., acknowledging a personal value-based mission), there are also many instances of SPS being less aware of the influence of factors such as role conceptualisations and the locus of the challenge on their sensemaking. SPS sensemaking is thus not fully objective or impartial: SPS are human, and like everyone they draw upon certain identities, frames and patterns of action without always much deliberate thought. They cannot pay attention to everything going on in the environment, and use plausible explanations extracted retrospectively as pathways to make meaning about the present (Weick 1995, Weber & Glynn 2006).

If taken as articulating aspirational ideals, the public service ethos might still be considered to serve a useful purpose. It is however a Westminster convention and as such is not just a behavioural guide, but forms an assumed reality which preserves SPS' élite privilege of advising ministers in private, and anonymously (Barberis 1998, Du Gay 2009, Richards & Smith 2016). I have shown in this study that public servant independence is not a reality but a myth, and therefore the basis on which SPS are afforded this privilege is flawed. So, there is

fundamental dissonance again between the empirical findings here and a central Westminster convention, which purports to *describe* as well as *proscribe* what SPS do.

Critics secondly perceive a decline of the Westminster system in the conceptualisation of SPS as 'leaders'. They suggest that the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm brought in a shift to individualistic notions of manager then leader, and away from the more collective concept of bureaucracy, which seriously undermines public servants' public service ethos, including their integrity (Du Gay 1996, Du Gay 2000, Barberis 2013). Their critique is not that SPS have consciously become more self-serving, but that the values contained within the norms and routines of NPM, in the very idea of a 'manager' or a 'leader', will have an inevitable influence on how public servants interpret the world and themselves. In du Gay's (1996) prediction, the "insistent singularity" of managerialism will vitiate the bureaucracy's "civil and ethical role in separating public administration from private moral enthusiasms" (p.165).

In this study I find that SPS' sense of individual mission, role conceptions and preferred framings are all important influences on individual sensemaking. These can be characterised as 'personal moral enthusiasms' - and they drive SPS at times to engage in leadership that seeks to promote frames and actions divergent from their ministers' (e.g., 'I have my own personal passions about equity and equality...' (3)). As such, this study affords some evidence for du Gay's (1996) prediction, and moreover shows *how* the degradation of the public service ethos may be taking place: not being replaced directly by self-interest, but by legitimacy being extended to broader notions of managerial and sociological appropriateness. SPS now draw on a wider array of sources of

legitimacy to support their sensemaking and leadership actions, expanding the interpretive space available to them, and at times enabling them to contest the preferences of their elected ministers. It can thus be argued that this study demonstrates the broadening and therefore weakening of SPS role conceptualisations and of the public service ethos, as du Gay predicted.

Third, the concept of legitimacy that emerges in my findings shows that ministerial direction forms the day-to-day shorthand for constitutional legitimacy in most SPS sensemaking: when SPS accept ministerial direction as unequivocal (Mode A), legitimacy concerns are barely present in their sensemaking; however, when they experience ministerial direction as equivocal and seek to offer alternative framings (Mode B), SPS invoke multiple claims to legitimacy to justify their divergent ideas and actions. This offers some support to the argument that the traditional co-dependence of ministers and SPS (implied in their 'indivisibility') has been largely replaced by an assumption of a principal-agent model (see also, Richards & Smith 2016); whereas under Traditional Public Administration, SPS held some constitutional authority in their own right (Hennessy 1989), my findings show SPS framing themselves as constitutionally subordinate, but balancing that with a sense of independent standing derived from outside constitutional arrangements. (It is useful to reflect here that the concept of *stewardship* observed in this study, while based in legislation was predominantly discussed in strategic management terms by my informants. Over time however, and if the independent campaign for a written constitution gains traction in New Zealand, it may evolve into a more explicit constitutional convention).

Entrepreneurialism vs. stewardship. The arguments above take on added portent when reflecting upon the context that has given rise to them. The tension between entrepreneurialism and stewardship reflects divergent views on the primary purpose of SPS as leaders. Those advocating greater entrepreneurialism again value government effectiveness, with leadership by those at top levels crucial to improving government delivery of outcomes (Moore 1995, Borins 2000, Van Wart 2003). Their priority is practical impact. By contrast, those valuing stewardship by SPS see their purpose as guarding the constitutional settlement, prioritising “stability, continuity and institutional memory... crucial to the realisation of responsible and effective governance” (du Gay, 2009, p.380).

I suggest the tension between entrepreneurialism and stewardship as two views on the purpose of SPS leadership has arisen because there is appetite for both. This study shows that at different times, SPS leadership practices are trying to respond to both of these competing desires for entrepreneurial management and stewardship. Collectively, SPS in both New Zealand and Wales are revealed to engage in both agenda leadership, bringing managerial practices to bear, *and* in steward leadership, where they assert independent agency and pursue an interpretation of the public interest out of kilter with the elected minister's.

I suggest the findings show that SPS are *independent* sensemakers and leaders, operating in the context of an expanded array of role conceptualisations and notions of legitimacy, which in principle affords them significant interpretive space and thus a broad canvas for leadership action. The Westminster conventions of indivisibility of minister and SPS, and of SPS

impartiality and objectivity (central to the public service ethos), are argued to be myths - myths which sustain rare privileges for SPS in terms of advising ministers behind closed doors, and acting in ministers' names. Nonetheless, the findings also indicate that SPS leadership usually stays within acceptable norms.

Here, I wish to invoke the spirit of Rhodes & Wanna's (2007) warning of the risks of entrepreneurial management to Westminster system governments. In their critique of public value (Moore 1995) discussed in Chapter 3, Rhodes & Wanna suggest that placing public servants as "platonic guardians and arbiters of the public interest" threatens democratic integrity because there is a danger that their interests come to dominate, displacing the democratic will (p.167).

Translated to the lexicon of this study, there is a danger that SPS' sensemaking – informed by their individual preferences – wins out over elected ministers' sensemaking in contests about which strategic public challenges to pay attention to, about how they are framed, and what action government takes in response. This study afforded a number of cases of SPS engaged in such 'steward leadership'. So while SPS may not be pursuing private interests, the fact they are making sense and leading independently of ministers poses a risk to the democratic character of the Westminster system that should be taken seriously.

A way forward. Some scholars contend that Westminster conventions are usefully malleable, affording SPS flexibility to pursue the public interest as contexts and challenges change (Rhodes et al. 2009, Weller & Haddon 2016). There is however a risk of complacency. The interpretive space identified here allows for SPS practices to evolve in response to new challenges, but the

integrity of the Westminster constitution relies on SPS' public service ethos - the individual values of political neutrality, independence and integrity instilled and reinforced by the collective culture of the administrative arm of government - to ensure that those practices are directed towards public rather than private interests. I have shown that SPS interpretations of legitimacy in play today reflect a broadening and weakening of that very public service ethos, increasing the risk of SPS pursuing private rather than public interests.

I thus suggest that seeking to reassert Westminster myths is unhelpful. I concur with Richards & Smith (2016) that they are "a legitimizing mythology for a way of governing that no longer exists" (p.512). Westminster myths encourage acceptance of SPS privileges that no longer stand up to scrutiny: they encourage us to believe SPS are impartial and so to accept SPS advising ministers in private (notably already circumscribed in New Zealand³) – yet this study shows SPS sensemaking is humanly partial; Westminster myths also encourage us to consider SPS as indivisible from their ministers - when this study demonstrates their sensemaking and leadership actions *may* align, but are fundamentally independent and can vary from ministerial direction.

Moreover, it is likely that the appetite for both agenda leadership and steward leadership by SPS will persist. In purely practical terms, Westminster government cabinets are relatively small; the New Zealand Government Cabinet has 20 members, plus eight ministers outside cabinet (DPMC 2017), and the Welsh Government Cabinet numbers nine members, with three

³ The publication of policy briefings for government ministers is today standard practice in New Zealand – see for example The Treasury's briefings webpage: <http://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/briefings>

ministers outside Cabinet (Welsh Government 2017). At the same time, these governments face a large and fast-changing array of strategic challenges (Podger 2004, Bennis 2007, Berman et al. 2017). A desire for 'more' leadership from SPS to supplement the bounded capacity of Cabinet ministers is understandable and can reasonably be expected to continue, and even grow. Indeed, during my research there was every indication that this appetite for both types of SPS leadership will continue, especially against a background characterised by a persistent normative discourse of leadership as vital in government (as witnessed in Chapter 3). Consequently, like Tiernan (2015), I conclude that the equivocality faced by SPS - in role expectations, and in their relationships with ministers - should be addressed, with the aim of reducing the constitutional risks of SPS leadership, in order to protect democratic integrity.

A fresh starting point is to view SPS as individual, human actors in government. This is a significant departure from the top-down paradigm-driven role conceptualisations (administrator, manager, leader) that dominate discourse on the role of SPS in Westminster systems. If SPS are acknowledged as independent human agents in government, Westminster conventions on the role of SPS are insufficient, and constitutional safeguards must be revisited. I propose two avenues for reform that offer complimentary potential: reinvigorating public service ethos as a mechanism for self-control, and updating external checks and balances (see also Olsen 2014).

First, the public service ethos is the key mechanism today that protects against SPS using their agency in pursuit of self-interest or bureaucratic preferences. It is therefore logical to invest in rearticulating the public service ethos and in reinforcing collective public service socialisation processes that inculcate and

reinforce it (Bromell 2010). While the UK civil service code (which covers Wales), and the State Services code of conduct in New Zealand have both been republished relatively recently (State Services Commission 2010, Civil Service 2015), I show in this study that notions of legitimacy at play in SPS sensemaking extend across not just constitutional, but also managerial and sociological considerations – a phenomenon I suggest represents a creeping expansion of the scope of what is considered appropriate and acceptable, and enlarges the discretionary space for SPS. Going forward, consistent emphasis upon the primacy of the constitutional values captured in the public service ethos is likely to be important. In New Zealand, these are currently summarised as fairness, impartiality, responsibility and trustworthiness; in the UK civil service they are integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality (State Services Commission 2010, Civil Service 2015). This contrasts with recent high profile interventions, such as O'Donnell as head of the British civil service championing 'pride, passion, pace and professionalism' (O'Donnell 2007) – values that were never satisfactorily reconciled with the core civil service values listed above.

Further, future articulations of the public service ethos should also be more clearly reconciled with expectations of SPS leadership. It is not obvious, for example, what impartiality and trustworthiness mean in the context of New Zealand SPS exercising the new duty of stewardship. Where reconciling these logics is not easy to do, acknowledging the tensions between them and so making the interpretive demands on SPS more transparent should also be helpful to protecting democratic integrity.

Socialisation, rather than formal training sessions, behavioural codes or legal standards, has traditionally been considered a main mechanism by which public

service ethos is transmitted in national public services, especially the UK (Chapman 1992, Greer & Jarman 2010). A similar emphasis is echoed in the sensemaking literature, in which studies show an individual's social network is a critical factor in belief formation (Siciliano, Moolenaar, Daly & Liou 2017). Yet socialisation is seen by some to be in decline, especially as measures to diversify and open up national public services to external talent have been introduced (Chapman & O'Toole 2010, Greer & Jarman 2010). While some of these changes have occurred in the pursuit of honourable goals of greater equality and representativeness in national public services (Greer & Jarman 2010), it is not clear that traditional socialisation mechanisms have been adequately replaced to ensure transmission of a strong public service ethos. It has been outside the scope of this study to explore how socialisation occurs *in practice* in today's far more porous national public service departments, and how it affects (senior) public servants' sensemaking. This could be a valuable direction for future research. Once contemporary socialisation of SPS is understood, it may be possible to then consider how a consistent public service ethos may be channelled through socialisation processes and relationships. In so doing, the public service ethos can be strengthened as a socially learnt structural logic, which primes, edits and triggers public servant sensemaking, and does so largely habitually and unconsciously (Weber & Glynn 2006, Holt & Cornelissen 2014).

Second, I argue that refreshing the public service ethos should be complemented by revision of the accountability and scrutiny routines surrounding SPS. While conscious pursuit of self-interest SPS is always a possibility (Carr 1999, Dunleavy 2014), my argument rests on two alternative points. One, acknowledge SPS as ethical, but human, public servants. Viewed

through this study's sensemaking lens, SPS, as influential actors working alongside but independently of ministers at the heart of government, individually interpret and enact the strategic challenges they face in cycles interwoven with the sensemaking of those around them. SPS sensemaking is subjective, and as such is primed by the limited cues they can extract, edited by the tendency to settle for the first plausible explanation reached, and innately tied to personal identity construction (Weick 1995). Two, while the context continues to be characterised by competing paradigms that generate broad interpretive space for SPS, and by rapid change, it is particularly important that all major government actors' sensemaking processes are open to testing: SPS' sensemaking and leadership practices (as well as those of special advisers and the ministers they serve) signal in real-time to others how to reconcile or at least navigate the competing logics rooted in overlapping paradigms (see also, Caron & Giauque 2006).

On this basis, reforms might include enhancement of internal accountability routines to operate as effective cross-checks on SPS' subjective, human sensemaking. Similar consideration might also be given to expanding external, independent scrutiny of SPS sensemaking and leadership (as ministers are accountable for theirs). In the US context, Kettl, Ingraham, Sanders & Horner (2010) note that in exchange for greater discretion, federal government 'reinvention labs' were subject to greater scrutiny. The same trade-off is applicable, I suggest, to the broad scope for sensemaking and leadership discretion potentially available to SPS in Westminster systems. There has been an increase in parliamentary scrutiny of SPS in recent years, but this has emerged incrementally (Chapman 2016). A more comprehensive review of accountability and scrutiny of SPS is now appropriate. The question of what

form future arrangements might take is, again, a potentially fertile avenue for future research.

The ultimate goal of revitalising the public service ethos, and reforming internal and external accountability routines around SPS, is to acknowledge the senior public service in Westminster systems as a guardian institution, that is staffed by public-interest-motivated, professional, *yet human* individuals – and accordingly, to enhance both self-control and external checks and balances (via internal accountability and independent scrutiny processes) on their leadership.

Operational implications: mitigating the shortcomings of everyday sensemaking

The second set of implications of this study's findings arises from research into the shortcomings of sensemaking in both everyday and crisis situations (Weick 1988, Patriotta 2003, Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010, Weick 2010, Colville et al. 2013, Leung, Zietsma & Peredo 2014). The sensemaking perspective highlights that the cycle of interpretation and enactment is characterised by bounded rationality operating in a complex, dynamic world (Weick et al. 2005, McDaniel 2007). Sensemaking highlights that being adaptive in how we make sense of the world is not a usual human preference; instead we tend to stick with meanings that seem to work; when they are disrupted, we quickly reach to what we are aware of, to help us construct plausible explanations for the 'new' situation (Weick 1995). Yet adaptiveness is considered a crucial quality for all leaders in government organisations, in order to respond effectively to challenges generated by their multi-sector, shared-power, no-one-wholly-in-

charge world (Pedersen & Hartley 2008, Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky 2009, Brookes & Grint 2010, Liddle 2010, Bryson et al. 2015).

SPS are the senior post-holders in the administrative arms of Westminster system governments: their sensemaking is a key factor in how governments respond to strategic challenges (see Kaplan 2008, Narayanan, Zane & Kemmerer 2011). The model presented in Chapter 9 maps the sensemaking pathways that enable and enact SPS leadership, and shows the profound influence of intrinsic identity factors, external structural logics and immediate action context on their sensemaking and leadership.

The major risk is that the plausible frames that SPS adopt for strategic challenges (and communicate to others) may be insufficient to elicit action in broadly the intended direction (Weick et al. 2005), leading towards ineffective government activity in the first instance, but potentially also consolidating commitment to the insufficient frame through repeated enactment. Accepted logics and norms can persist through repetition, and can encourage sensemaking that is insensitive to changes in the external environment – leading to a failure to adapt (Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010). For example, Termeer (2009) points to norms in policy development inhibiting effective action on sustainable development; the dominant logic of collaboration in Wales identified in this study might be similarly critiqued as persisting without reflection on its effectiveness. Mode A, as the everyday ‘business-as-usual’ mode of SPS sensemaking and leadership, is an example of where such insensitive and non-adaptive sensemaking is most likely to arise.

In face of SPS’ human limitations and a complex environment, the sensemaking literature also holds some insights into how their individual sensemaking might

be improved. Colville et al. (2013) provide a starting point, located at the end of a particularly eloquent statement of the problem (and as such quoted in full):

“Framing pursues experience into memory, where it is systematically altered to conform to our canonical representations of the social world (Bruner, 1990: 56). This organization of past experience is brought to bear on current circumstances in the hope that a past representation will provide a plausible answer to what the story is, or what is going on. This is why a sensible event is one that resembles something that has happened before and why history is crucial to understanding the process of how events are ushered into existence (Weick, 1995). In order to make sense of what is going on amidst this ongoing stream of experience, people have to interrupt that stream to step aside and reflect back on what it is that has just happened” (Colville et al, 2013, p.22-23, my emphasis).

The starting point to reduce the risk of insensitive sensemaking is thus interrupting the individual’s stream of experience. Weick (2010) suggests alertness is required - a readiness to notice things that seem unusual or out of kilter with your interpretive framing. This demands a state of doubt, enabled by clear acknowledgment that all sensemaking is provisional (Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010, Weick 2010). Dissemination of this study might be a way to improve SPS alertness, by raising awareness of key factors influencing sensemaking in their institutional context. (Surfacing the influence of my own identity construction, using this study to educate public service colleagues would also satisfy my emancipatory axiology).

On their own, however, doubt and alertness are insufficient. They must be accompanied by awareness, an effort to generate conjectures about what a noticed anomaly might mean (Weick 2010). This process of ‘updating’ then enables the individual to revise her interpretations on the basis of the new information (Christianson 2009, Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010). Together these processes, it is argued, can help reduce the risk of falling foul of sensemaking

shortcuts that “turn shared meanings into substantial blinders” (Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010, p.561).

I suggest these recommendations can be translated into government practice at both the individual and organisational level. Academic evidence that these or similar practices exist in national public services is deficient, and my professional experience suggests they do not. I therefore cautiously propose these ideas as innovations to be trialled and reviewed. First, individual SPS can heed Weick’s caution to “treat memory as a pest” (Weick, 1979, quoted in Gioia 2006, p.1717) and so maintain the state of doubt needed to cue alertness, awareness and updating. Strategic scanning practices are demonstrated to be valuable in this effort, linked to executives’ ability to handle equivocality – including priming early leadership actions such as setting up teams and reporting systems to further expand scanning and so formalising doubting and updating (Daft & Lengel 1986, Thomas et al. 1993). Scanning intensity and proactiveness have also been shown to enable more adaptation by accessing and using uncommon knowledge (Nag & Gioia 2012).

Second, national public services might take action to support scanning by SPS. Especially at senior levels, working in government departments is known to be highly pressurised owing to the proximity to the political world, and the scale of business being handled (Rhodes 2005). Many of this study’s informants in the New Zealand and Welsh governments report a sense that in their jobs it is ‘normal’ to face multiple demands, and feel under considerable pressure day-to-day. So, while individual SPS benefit from wide interpretive space, they are under pressure to generate meaning quickly for themselves and for others. The development of routines to support, or even require, pro-active doubting and

updating of SPS sensemaking may prove useful to averting Maitlis & Senseshein's (2010) 'blindness' and to enabling more adaptive SPS leadership to emerge. In addition, national public services might also consider embedding the sensemaking perspective in the behavioural expectations set for public servants (e.g., in codes of conduct and standards). For example, the maintenance of a state of doubt could be made a requirement for SPS, linked to the (updated?) public service ethos values of impartiality and objectivity.

Overall, I argue that mitigating the shortcomings of SPS sensemaking is an important opportunity via which government responses to strategic challenges may be improved. At an individual and organisational level, a sensemaking lens can be adopted to sensitise SPS to the processes and inherent weaknesses of human sensemaking; measures to support doubting and updating, and in particular strategic scanning practices, present as a practical first step.

Chapter summary

The purpose of this discussion chapter has been two-fold. I sought first to summarise the key findings in this thesis, and show how they address the study's aim and first research question (RQ1). Second, I aimed to demonstrate the study's main contribution to knowledge through a detailed consideration of the implications of my empirical findings for the academic debate on the phenomenon of SPS leadership (RQ2). I split the debate into two parts: the dominant constitutional debate, and an operational debate on the doing of sensemaking and leadership.

Constitutionally, my argument is that the sensemaking lens applied in this study reveals that senior public servants (SPS) are individuals whose identities and preferences shape their leadership on strategic challenges. Their preferences can align them to their minister's agenda (agenda leadership), or lead them to try to shift an agenda, by engaging in practices to reframe the challenge and/or proposed response (steward leadership). SPS report they operate ethically, but they cannot be considered neutral or impartial, as Westminster myths promulgate. I conclude that demand for SPS to engage in agenda and steward leadership will continue, to supplement the bounded leadership of elected ministers. Accordingly, it is appropriate to review socialisation of the public service ethos, and to reform scrutiny and accountability routines in recognition that SPS are independent human actors at the heart of government.

Operationally, I suggest that insights from the sensemaking literature can help to mitigate some of the potential shortcomings of SPS leadership. SPS report significant pressure day-to-day, which is likely to reduce capacity for alertness, awareness and updating, and render their leadership less adaptive - yet the environment for government leaders is both complex and shifting. I argue for investment in action on both the individual and organisational levels to support SPS to maintain a constructive state of doubt.

Overall, I believe that humanising SPS leadership, seeing it as formed bottom-up through what is *done*, has provided a fresh empirical starting point from which to contribute new insights into an enduring debate. I pick up this theme on the contribution of this study to knowledge, and the future research agenda it might inspire in my final, concluding chapter – to which I now turn.

Chapter 11 Conclusions

Arriving at Chapter 11, I conclude this study by reviewing its contribution to knowledge, while also recognising key limitations stemming from its focus and research design. This leads into a reflective and reflexive discussion of the research process, before I set out a future research agenda, and offer closing remarks.

In this thesis, I set out to investigate the contested but empirically under-researched phenomenon of leadership by senior public servants (SPS) in Westminster system governments. I have explored how individual SPS make sense of strategic challenges, and the sensemaking pathways that enable them to respond with leadership practices. I have taken an inductive approach, focussing on the sensemaking processes of noticing, framing and responding to develop a deep understanding of how SPS leadership is accomplished. The study has sought to expose not only what SPS leadership looks like, but also to uncover the influences upon it in order to answer Weick's (1995) guiding question 'what's going on here?'

I have used qualitative interview data from two sites of Westminster system government, the national public services of the New Zealand and Welsh governments, to develop rich narrative accounts and a process model of SPS' sensemaking pathways to leadership. I find two distinct sensemaking modes and associated clusters of leadership practices: Mode A sensemaking enabling and enacting agenda leadership, and Mode B sensemaking enabling and enacting steward leadership.

In presenting these findings, I have sought to offer empirical evidence on the phenomenon of leadership of SPS into the predominantly normative debate surrounding it. As such, I have sought not only to communicate the new theoretical model generated, but also to locate it in the public administration literature on leadership. I suggested that the demand for SPS to supplement the bounded leadership of elected ministers will continue and so constitutional risks must be addressed. I argued that my model confirms SPS as independent, human leaders in government rather than neutral, impartial bureaucrats – and that approaches to socialisation, scrutiny and accountability of SPS should be revised in recognition. I also offered some insights from the sensemaking literature into how public service departments and individual SPS can mitigate some of the shortcomings of their human sensemaking by maintaining a constructive state of doubt. I ended with the reflection that humanising SPS leadership, as I have done in this thesis, has enabled me to afford new insight into a long-standing public administration debate.

Contributions to knowledge

In this section, I suggest the ways in which this study's findings, and the subsequent discussion, contribute to knowledge. The section is split into three parts: first, the empirical contribution, followed by the theoretical contribution to the public administration debate on SPS and leadership, and finally a note on the contribution to the sensemaking perspective too.

Empirical contribution

Independent of the model and discussion, the study's findings narratives make a contribution to knowledge about the practices of senior public servants. SPS are a hard to reach élite, and empirical research focussing on SPS as the main subjects in focus are relatively rare even in the field of public administration. Under the Traditional Public Administration paradigm, where research has been undertaken at the level of individuals, the emphasis has tended to be on the ministerial-civil servant partnership; under NPM and current governance paradigms, studies have tended to focus on 'managers' and 'leaders' across public service tiers and sectors, either omitting or subsuming national public servants into wider datasets and definitions.

This study is, to my knowledge, the first empirical investigation into the practices of SPS from a sensemaking perspective. It adds to a rich but slim seam of research centring on SPS leadership in Westminster systems, and is the first to do so both across the two sites of the New Zealand and Welsh governments, and applying a lens derived from organisation studies. I have found patterns across the cohort of SPS in both countries that have enabled me to offer insight into the sensemaking processes of SPS who engage in leadership practices, and the major factors that influence them.

Theoretical contribution to the public administration literature on SPS and leadership

While public leadership and administrative leadership are subject to increasing theorisation (e.g., Brookes and Grint, 2010; Van Wart 2014), they do not take account of the specific context of Westminster system government. This thesis makes a significant contribution into this gap in our theoretical knowledge:

a key theoretical outcome and contribution of this thesis is the **process model of SPS leadership** in Westminster system governments. The model not only shows that SPS leadership is formed of two distinct clusters of practices (agenda leadership and steward leadership), but also exposes how SPS sensemaking pathways lead them to adopt each cluster. The pathways are triggered by differences in the experience of political intensity and equivocality, and show that SPS engaged in agenda leadership access contrasting structural logics and identity factors to those engaged in steward leadership.

In the course of developing the model, several new or enhanced concepts with theoretical implications emerged. These are all discussed in Chapter 9, and so are only listed here: I articulate concepts of **agenda leadership** and **steward leadership** in terms of the practices engaged in by SPS, which complement current notions of *leadership-in-government* (or *administrative leadership*) in the literature with concepts specifically induced from practices in the context of Westminster government systems; I expand the concept of **legitimacy** utilized (Suchman 1995, Terry 2015), to distinguish between legitimacy of *action*, and legitimacy of *agency*; I offer a new concept of the **dominant logics of reform** to capture locally prevailing ideas about *change* in government and public services which intertwine and inform the interpretation of leadership; and I identify a rather fuzzier concept of **independent standing** as an SPS' sense of her positioning in social networks independent of her relationship with the minister. This sense of standing emerges as an important factor enabling the SPS to interpret her own agency as legitimate when acting beyond clear ministerial direction.

Here, I feel I must repeat that in constructing the model I drew upon valuable existing concepts, such as the core sensemaking process framework of noticing, framing and responding - as discussed in detail in Chapter 4 - without which the whole abductive stage of analysis would almost certainly have been harder, as well as less far reaching. I have indeed 'stood on the shoulders of giants' (attributed to Isaac Newton, 1676).

I have also sought to locate these findings in the predominantly normative debate on leadership by SPS in Westminster system governments. I have argued that my findings show that SPS are not neutral, impartial bureaucrats, but human individuals whose identities and preferences shape their leadership on strategic challenges. My argument rests in particular on the finding that SPS' identity preferences can align them to their minister's agenda (agenda leadership), or lead them to try to shift an agenda towards their own, alternative framing of the public interest (steward leadership). I then argued that both these modes of SPS leadership exist because on the one hand there is a desire for both better management *and* stewardship in government, and on the other hand the leadership capacity of elected ministers is bounded. I thus suggest the demand for SPS leadership will continue, and therefore that socialisation, scrutiny and accountability approaches must be updated to better reconcile SPS as independent human actors to democratic Westminster system constitutions.

Overall, I suggest my contribution to the debate on leadership by SPS in Westminster system governments is an effort to cut through perennial normative disagreements via empirically grounded investigation. My interpretation of SPS leadership as posing a potential constitutional risk to

democratic Westminster government might be construed as placing my argument firmly within the cohort of scholars who view the Westminster system as in decline, such as Du Gay, Chapman & O'Toole. I share their diagnosis, but do not see a return to traditional bureaucracy as the solution; management and leadership are ideas that are now entrenched and also hold some value, even though such value can be overstated. Rather, like Rhodes (2014) and Kane (2007), my argument and recommendations centre on the need to preserve the primacy of politics in the practices of those who perform Westminster system government. In this way, I hope this study also contributes to a new wave of debate about the future evolution of Westminster system governments.

Contribution to the sensemaking literature

At the start of this research process, I did not hold an ambition of adding to the literature on the sensemaking perspective. My focus was rather to attempt to bring fresh insight into the ongoing debate on leadership by SPS in Westminster system governments by using the theoretical and methodological tools of a practice-based view of sensemaking. Nonetheless I submit that this study makes some bounded contributions, in particular to the sub-literature on sensemaking and leadership.

To date, studies of leadership-as-sensemaking have focussed on sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991), and located it as a social process between people (Drath and Palus 1994, Pye 2005). These studies provided valuable grounding for the conceptualisations of agenda leadership and steward leadership in this study, especially Kaplan's notion of collective meaning-making via the practice of framing contests (Kaplan 2008). This study extends the leadership-as-sensemaking literature to date by examining the individual sensemaking

pathways that *lead to and constitute* leadership practices. In so doing, it offers insight into the interpretive paths that take individuals in relatively senior hierarchical positions, but in situations where leadership is dispersed, towards engaging in leadership practices. Through inductive analysis, key factors influencing these interpretive paths have been highlighted (as above).

Further, as in Chapter 3, I contend that a cognitive view on individual sensemaking can be complementary to the view of sensemaking as a social process if interpretation is seen as nested within the social process of sensegiving, a position I identify as shared by Whiteman and Cooper (2011) and Lockett et al. (2014). This study thus opens up the possibility of exploring the recursive relationship between individual and collective sensemaking, and between sensemaking and extrinsic factors.

Finally, this study also responds to two calls made in recent reviews of the field. First, scholars have tended to focus on sensemaking around crises or major events such as organisational change programmes, resulting in calls for more research into sensemaking in mundane events (Brown et al. 2015, Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015). I began this study with a view to exploring SPS sensemaking in response to strategic challenges – events or phenomena of strategic significance but not felt by the informant to be a crisis (at the time of data collection at least). This study confirms Rhodes (2011) observation that such challenges are the norm in government, and as such the findings and model both make a contribution to knowledge about sensemaking, in this particular context; I identify Mode A in particular as fitting Patriotta's notion of everyday sensemaking (Patriotta 2003).

Second, Maitlis & Christianson (2014) call for more sensemaking studies to capture patterns across contexts. This study identifies consistent patterns (and acknowledged variances) from interview data across two sites of Westminster system government, the New Zealand and Welsh governments, to build an inductive process model of individual SPS sensemaking in Westminster system governments. The study thus makes a small contribution to broadening the institutional and geographic reach of the sensemaking literature. (I discuss limitations to its generalizability below).

Study limitations

As for any interpretive study, questions about the trustworthiness of findings arise, in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba 1985). By observing the principles of the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al. 2013) I have sought to address these questions: in Chapter 5, I provide a detailed and open account of my sampling strategy and research process; in the finding chapters (Chapters 7, 8 and 9), I foreground the voices of the key informants, and demonstrate transparency through the discipline of producing a data structure. Nonetheless, it is important to highlight potential issues pro-actively, hopefully further inspiring readers' confidence in the study. To adopt a colloquialism, it is incumbent upon the researcher to present a study 'warts and all'.

First, the research design was cross-sectional, affording deep insight at one point in time; however the study does not offer insight into *changes* in sensemaking over time (unlike a longitudinal study), or collective sensemaking

processes (that might be achieved for example via a case study design) and can reflect only the phenomenon of SPS leadership and prevailing structural conditions during the period of data collection: November 2016 to March 2017. The detailed background descriptions of the research sites in Chapter 6 help to put these in context. The study was deliberately designed to explore individual sensemaking by a cohort of SPS in order to focus, for just one study, on the practices of a particularly under-researched actor within the heart of Westminster system governments. Further, the focus is on individual SPS practices *in response to strategic challenges*; organisational leadership, leadership (or other activities) in public partnerships and networks and the practices deployed in response to non-strategic challenges are all beyond the scope of this study.

Second, the sampling strategy began purposively but access difficulties drove a degree of pragmatism. The resultant sample was slightly skewed towards the most senior SPS and, possibly as a consequence, also slightly skewed towards informants who were male, and older. How significantly the demographics of age and gender influence senior public servant sensemaking over other structural antecedents is unknown, though there is some evidence of demographics generating variation in sensemaking in alternative settings (see for example, Mair 2005).

Third, the use of a single data collection method, loose semi-structured interviews, may also attract criticism (Krefting 1991). Interviews are an excellent means of accessing individual perceptions, meanings and thus sensemaking (Alvesson & Deetz 2000, Fossey, Harvey et al. 2002). They are also a common technique within grounded interpretive research (Suddaby 2006) and

sensemaking research (see for example, Gioia & Thomas 1996, Maitlis & Lawrence 2003, Bean & Hamilton 2006). They are however typically used in combination with other data collection techniques, often observation and documentary analysis. My justification for a reliance on interviews is that my aim was to access *individual* sensemaking processes, which are difficult to observe and unlikely to be represented in organisational or policy documentation. A precedent for a sensemaking study relying on interview data is available in Maclean et al. (2012) who analysed the career stories of elite business leaders. Rather than triangulate across multiple sources, then, in this study I sought instead to triangulate across sources within my sample (Patton 1999).

Finally, the boundaries of even the modest generalizability claimed should be made clear. The study was conducted in two sites of Westminster system government, the New Zealand and Welsh governments. The Westminster system is however a collection of mutable conventions and principles, which are localised in each instantiation, and are even then subject to wide interpretation (Hood 1991, Rhodes 2005, Bevir & Rhodes 2006, Rhodes et al. 2009, Rhodes 2011, Richards & Smith 2016, Weller & Haddon 2016). Whether these findings offer explanatory power for SPS leadership in other sites of Westminster government – even those considered most similar such as Australia, Canada, or England – cannot therefore be assumed and demands testing.

Reflecting on the research experience

This study is the first time I have engaged with and deployed a sensemaking lens, and I discuss here some of the lessons learnt to inform future efforts. To a

newcomer, the sensemaking perspective can seem exciting and daunting in equal measure. It yields fascinating insights into organisations/organising (see all those cited in Chapter 3) but can also evoke bewilderment at how on earth such insights are reached; methodologies in journal articles rarely discuss the ‘gestalt’ moment at which the whole picture of what’s going on begins to take shape. For this reason, Gioia & colleagues’ articulation of the Gioia methodology, which offers a description both of some steps that can be taken and the experience of taking them, holds great appeal (Gioia et al. 2013). As the authors state however, their methodology is “a flexible orientation toward qualitative, inductive research” (p.26), not a perfect formula.

My experience as a doctoral researcher has been that the *principles* of the Gioia methodology, and some of the *reassurances* offered – “you gotta get lost before you can get found” (Gioia et al. 2013, p.20) – have been invaluable. Building a data structure that renders the connections between data and concepts transparent, and then mapping the linkages between concepts, were helpful processes that demanded rigour, and meant I repeatedly cross-checked that I was interpreting data points fairly. I did however need to add to the Gioia methodology to meet the needs of this study. While the emphasis on qualitative rigour is one I applaud, findings written to explain concept construction are not always effective at conveying the story, of offering readers an accessible answer to Weick’s guiding question, ‘What’s going on here?’ (Weick 1995). Alongside model construction, I therefore also developed the ideal-type narratives that are presented in Chapters 7 and 8. Doing so provided another stage at which I circled back into the data as well as to the emergent model, to cross-check that the narrative interpretation reflected both accurately.

Yet in the end, the prompt to shift from inductive data analysis to theorizing through abductive reasoning (Mantere & Ketokivi 2013) came not from my solo work but from a supervisor, and my gestalt moments came during or after conversations with supervisors or colleagues. In sum, while undeniably time-consuming, I would employ an adapted Gioia methodology again for the rigour it encourages in qualitative research, but I would do so in collaboration, ideally with colleague(s) from complimentary discipline(s).

Second, the experience of this study reinforced for me the importance of carefully managing the informant experience. Inevitably, empirical studies of national governments require access to a relatively élite population. Especially at senior levels, public servants are time-poor, and face many demands for their attention that may feel more pressing than participating in an academic study. Moreover, they also expect researchers to show both expertise and professionalism in their conduct (see Moyser 2006). For this study, the most successful tactic for securing interviews was to tap into my own personal network, and those of supportive colleagues. The fact that a known and respected colleague, such as Girol Karacaoglu in New Zealand, was endorsing the research proved crucial to opening doors. The resultant informant population was unavoidably shaped in part by the nature of the networks accessed; I have acknowledged the spread in this study is skewed slightly towards those holding the highest posts; but at the same time, the total pool of informants was significantly larger than may have been possible if such networks were not tapped.

Throughout the study, I maintained full, open and pro-active communication with informants, as a way to acknowledge their investment in the study and their

role as co-conceptualisers (Fleetwood 2005). Overall, I believe this routine afforded my elite SPS informants assurance that the study was being conducted to professional standards that they expect and value. I hope that it has also left them with a positive experience of academic research, and reinforced their willingness to participate in the future.

Future research directions

In this section, I reflect on the research direction set by this study, and set out some ideas for future research that result. The experience of conducting this study has demonstrated to me that a practice-based view of sensemaking holds enormous potential to add to the array of public administration lenses, tools and techniques currently used to study national governments. Sensemaking focuses the researcher's eye on "the interplay of action and interpretation rather than the influence of evaluation on choice" (Weick et al. 2005, p.409), decentring rational and formal processes, and forcing attention to the fluid, dynamic and fundamentally social practices through which sense is made, and given. As I hope I have shown in this study, sensemaking has the potential to explain action within government in a way that is methodologically rigorous *and* which is intuitively appealing to practitioners. There are manifold opportunities for high quality and impactful research; I divide my discussion here into some suggestions for research projects that could flow immediately from this study, and then ideas for a longer-term sensemaking-in-government research agenda.

In this study, I have been engaged in theory building. An obvious next step is to go beyond model construction to empirical verification, and to test the model

and concepts offered. This might involve operationalisation of all or part of the model, and/or explicit effort to test the boundaries of the model (e.g., beyond the sites used here or under different political or social conditions). Addressing the question of when and how SPS move between agenda leadership and steward leadership, or indeed between leadership, followership, and other practices might further enrich our knowledge about the conditions within which SPS leadership takes place.

It may also be fruitful to extend the examination of a number of concepts identified. For example, the centrality of legitimacy concerns when SPS are faced with equivocality came as a surprise during this research process. Further exploration of the distributed and mutable interpretations of what constitutes legitimacy, for actions and for actors, within government organisations could offer new insight into how individuals navigate ambiguity in government organisations – a topic of recent research interest (see for example Hammerschmid et al. 2013, Rainey & Jung 2014). Likewise, I identified Kaplan's (2008) concept of framing contests as affording explanatory value for SPS' steward leadership practices. Focussed examination of framing contests within the executive arm of government, using the lens of sensemaking as social process, might afford rich empirical accounts of the micro-processes through which political and bureaucratic preferences play out – and potentially the beginnings of new theory too.

In the longer-term, this study opens up opportunities not just to better understand government, but to re-conceptualise *governing* altogether. I see significant potential opportunities for drawing upon the sensemaking perspective to generate new theoretical and empirical knowledge through

studies that (methodologically-consistently) fuse its tools and techniques with new and extant knowledge in public administration – as I have sought to do in this study. This approach will demand more research that captures the ‘micro’ processes of sensemaking and its recursive and intertwined relationship to ‘macro’ structures and logics, often already known in the public administration literature. For example, a practice-oriented study of how public servants make meaning of ‘public service ethos’ today could potentially offer useful insight to inform action in response to my recommendation in this study to update socialisation of SPS. Access will undoubtedly be a challenge, but is possible where trusted relationships are built (see both this study, and famously, Rhodes’ study of the British government, Rhodes 2005, 2011). There is also a strong normative argument that scrutiny of the workings of government is itself important to the quality of democracy, as well as to its operational improvement.

A sensemaking-in-government research agenda could also contribute into a similar gap in the literature identified by Colebatch (2014) in his argument for a practice turn in the study of governance. Here, he suggests a practice view resonates with the approaches of eminent scholars like Stoker (1998) and Rhodes (1997), but it is not focused on official institutions, or an attempt to characterise a system, but a new and way to talking about the *doing* of governing (Colebatch 2014). Three examples illustrate the potential contribution.

One, a sensemaking lens on the social processes of policy development, for example, could be a powerful means by which to cast light on how policy ideas emerge, are contested, and gain support *within* as well as outside government administrations. Such research could build on the insights offered by Page and

colleagues into the policy discretion of mid-ranking public servants (Page 2003, Page and Jenkins 2005, Page 2007), as well as models of policy development, from the public administration literature – and on conceptual tools such as socio-materiality from the sensemaking perspective (Feldman & Orlikowski 2011) - to offer fresh explanations of ‘governing’ action. Two, building on the growing interest in public leadership (t'Hart 2014, Vogel & Masal 2015, Chapman, Getha-Taylor et al. 2016), as well as in sensemaking-as-leadership (Pye 2005, Humphreys et al. 2012), a further stream of research might explore the embodied experience of leading on strategic public challenges. In this way, we could begin to build rich accounts of the influence of the temporal, physical and emotional factors on collective processes of leading in and around government (Cunliffe & Coupland 2012). Three, in this study, I recommend the updating of internal accountability and external scrutiny of SPS in recognition that they are individual sensemakers in government, and not ‘indivisible’ from ministers; it may be valuable to examine the forms that accountability and scrutiny processes might take if designed to respond to the weaknesses of human sensemaking (similar to the work done by Weick and colleagues on high reliability organisations – see for example Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2008).

In sum, national governments and especially national public service departments are under-researched sites, compared to companies, generic organisations, and indeed the wider public sector. Yet what happens within governments, and in the public services that support them, is of critical importance to almost every aspect of our lives. The experience of undertaking this first study has convinced me that the sensemaking perspective offers enormous potential to generate new empirical and theoretical knowledge about the internal doings of government.

Closing remarks

In this thesis, I have used the lens of the sensemaking perspective to explore the contemporary practice of leadership by senior public servants within Westminster system governments. This chapter has summarised the study's contribution to knowledge, acknowledged key limitations stemming from the study's focus and research design, reflected on the research process, and outlined a future research agenda for sensemaking-in-government.

The foremost contribution of this study is the process model of SPS leadership in Westminster system governments, which identifies two patterns of leadership practices, agenda leadership and steward leadership, and explains why SPS engage in each. I suggested that the study contributes empirical evidence to the public administration debate on leadership-in-government in Westminster system governments, and in so doing also contributes to the literature on everyday sensemaking and sensemaking-as-leadership.

I have argued that the model, and overall study, can serve an emancipatory function: by making SPS aware of these multiple influences on their interpretation and action, and enabling doubting and updating practices, I hope to encourage them to reflect upon their own meaning-making. More fundamentally, I suggest the model demonstrates SPS are individual, independent and human sensemakers and as such cannot be constitutionally assumed to be indivisible from their ministers, or perfectly impartial, as Westminster conventions promulgate. Instead, socialisation, accountability and

scrutiny routines and norms should be updated to reflect the independent sensemaking and leadership SPS engage in today.

Reflecting on this study, I encourage scholars across the public administration discipline to view the everyday actions of real people in governments as consequential to producing 'government'. I conclude that a research agenda on sensemaking-in-government offers an exciting new dimension to our field.

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Appendix A Data tables

In this appendix, I provide three data tables that substantiate the connections I have made between first-order constructs and second-order concepts. Table A.1 is the summary data table for Mode A and agenda leadership, and Table A.2 is the summary data table for Mode B and steward leadership. These are relatively short and comprise select examples that serve to illustrate how the constructs and concepts build. Table A.3 is an extended data table for all the concepts discussed in chapters 7, 8 and 9, which affords access to more of the primary data.

Table A.1: Summary data table for Mode A and agenda leadership

Example connected quotations (NZ)	Example connected quotations (Wales)
<p>Noticing: Politically intense cue</p> <p><i>Overnight suddenly one year [a service delivery agency] went to massive deficit. So <u>the Minister of the day called me</u> to say, "So you know how these things work, <u>fix it</u>." And so I said, "Okay."</i></p> <p><i>To be honest, the tension is increasing at an exponential rate year by year... So while we have had this stuff building up the last 5, 10 years, you didn't have the intensity. I think it really hit a point three years ago... And it was almost like the tipping point. It highlighted the issue.</i></p>	<p><i>I am not suggesting this is the last 12 months, you know, I am talking over, but again, what it does, <u>it starts to raise itself up the public profile</u>. So to some extent government responds to what the public notice? and what's happening?</i></p>
<p>Logics: Dominant logics of reform</p> <p>Systems thinking & outcome focus:</p> <p><i>...let's come together, let's not talk from individual institution perspective, let's focus on that community... what's the <u>outcome</u>? what they're faced with? what do we think we can do collectively that will have an <u>impact</u> on the community? And it's an experiment.</i></p> <p><i>And I said, "Fine, look it's not me talking, <u>it's the future talking at you</u>. I'm just channelling. All right?" ... do you <u>realise how fast the future is here</u>?</i></p>	<p>Austerity (money down, demand up):</p> <p><i>... <u>austerity</u> and the fact that, you know, we already spend a very large chunk of our GDP on health and so there's people's willingness to increase the level of taxation <u>to do more</u>, against a backdrop of <u>huge increasing demand</u> from – victim of our own success – an ageing population...</i></p> <p>Collaboration:</p> <p><i>...<u>collaboration</u> starts with the frontline... ...wanting to push people into <u>different models of collaboration</u>... ...So although there's a <u>spirit of collaboration</u>... it feels that the system can conspire against you... ...when we're looking for people to act differently</i></p>

Table A.1: Summary data table for Mode A and agenda leadership

Example connected quotations (NZ)	Example connected quotations (Wales)
	<i>or use, you know, terms like <u>collaborative leadership</u>, you can definitely show a path but you need... you need to not be the only person doing it...</i> <i>... the worst thing for me would be only where I go <u>collaboration</u> happens...</i> Opportunity of devolution: <i>...there is something, sometimes about the way in which we engage. You can have an engagement mechanism that is about doing stuff to people... but <u>the real prize</u> that we have about <u>Wales with its public service ethos</u> is when you blend those things together, you get a much more cohesive narrative</i>
<i>Intrinsic factors: professional manager role conception</i> <i>Free and frank advice but... it is the politicians who are elected, and in the end they make the decision... And as a public servant you are <u>committed to implementing it</u></i> <i>I was a national director for a big operation ... [I] created a bit of a conundrum for the system because we now had people in the [centre] who <u>understood how the system worked</u>... ...we had to make things happen and therefore <u>my role became much more interventionist on the sector because I knew how the sector worked</u>... we didn't write a lot of papers, we <u>just made phone calls</u>... "I'm calling to say, "I know you know I know", so <u>let's get on with this</u>. So fix it, or <u>we'll fix it for you</u>. That simple."</i>	<i>Well, actually when I'm outside, I usually say <u>I'm the Chief Executive [rather than a SPS]</u> because that seems to be the most straight forward area and probably the role most people <u>validate me for</u>...</i>
<i>Intrinsic factors: professional mission</i> <i>... <u>I had a sense I could actually be a chief executive</u>...</i> <i>So I have a personal coach... The best thing I ever did. Should have done it much earlier in my career. Maybe amongst other things. And he helped me quite a lot. And four years ago, before I took on this role by the way, he and I had a conversation and he said, "[Name], you need to have a better imagination and creativity <u>if you are to lead</u>" ...I said, "Yes, that's very logical. I get that... <u>Tell me how to fix it now</u>." He said, "Read different things. Talk to different people. Listen to different voices." And <u>that's been my journey</u> for the last four years.</i>	<i>I'm a [sector] manager by background and I am still, technically, a [sector] manager because I'm on secondment into the civil service... I guess I was clearly <u>keen</u> to apply for [this dual role] in respect to the [sector manager] bit... probably, I was maybe <u>less keen</u> about the [SPS] aspect of it</i>
<i>Framing: Less equivocal ministerial direction</i> <i>Overnight suddenly one year [a service delivery agency] went to massive deficit. So <u>the Minister of the day called me</u> to say, "So you know how these things work, <u>fix it</u>." And so I said, "Okay."</i>	<i>So, I've previously run large organizations, I'm now in a large organization, but my role to run it is in a very different capacity because the <u>ministerial direction dominates</u></i>

Table A.1: Summary data table for Mode A and agenda leadership

Example connected quotations (NZ)	Example connected quotations (Wales)
<i>So the Minister of the day actually got me to intervene more and more...</i>	<i>So where is the minister on this? Well, clearly it's a manifesto commitment, hugely supportive, but is just expecting us to get on with it really... We will then present [the draft strategy] and they [ministers] can test it, and we should be working across government to make sure we've lined that up.</i>
Framing: As a delivery challenge <i>I talked to [the service delivery agency]; I said, "Look, we know each other very well, here's the bottom line. I don't know all the details, but I can get to them real quick. The Minister wants to give you the chance to fix this, if you fail to fix it, [we] will be coming in to fix it for you."</i>	<i>I think I'm working in a much more interventionist environment in terms of me needing to discharge some of the [service] expectations for ministers than has been the case before... we are now pulling levers in a different way.... So I have got a line management oversight that helps me, and I can try to pull the levers</i>
Responding: Agenda leadership Leading and designing strategic response: <i>... I was in 12 months of turnaround. Because they know what we are capable of doing it, so we moved in. And we've done that a number of times...</i> <i>So basically we designed a programme, which actually had very good principles.</i> Delivery focussed ministerial reporting: <i>Interviewer: So your role in that was... keeping the pressure on? Interviewee: It was to, in the first instance, always monitor the performance; where performance slipped, we would discuss with ministers and ministers would say, "Do you think they can do it?"... In the event they struggled, then we would need to step in.</i> Challenging own organisation: <i>I dramatically changed the [department]. I had a mandate to do that... So the first year has been purely internal because I've actually had to rebuild my senior team... I'm not allowing them to be comfortable... I'm quite demanding on the [department] in terms of asking them to lead by example: change, so start.</i> Face of the agenda: <i>So what we've done is we have been quite deliberate in our conversation with the sector, with the public service....</i> <i>So we had a symposium... And then I hosted the dinner. And invited 20 organisations from the sector.</i>	Leading and designing strategic response: <i>There's one challenge at the moment about a regional template... we know the best outcomes are gonna be achieved when the whole [service] system is linked together in the right way... ...one should really drive it from the fact that, bluntly, we can have a better individual citizen experience...and, and by the way, surely it must be smarter use of resources.</i> Delivery focussed ministerial reporting: <i>...we will be updating her [the minister] actually on where we on the range of manifesto commitments in the next month or so</i> <i>I think the key thing for us as government is to be able to demonstrate that we've made progress?</i> <i>...what we have to be able to demonstrate is that we are making things better, that the stuff is going in the right direction</i> Challenging own organisation: <i>So I think there's something about our practice through our [organisation] structures needing to change as people breakthrough from quite a traditional mode?... I also think there's a bit of a challenge to the [organisation itself] about how it changes its model of service?</i> Face of the agenda: <i>And to be part of cajoling, supporting... I can go to national events and broker that myself and participate</i>

Table A.2: Summary data table for Mode B and steward leadership

Example connected quotations (NZ)	Example connected quotations (Wales)
<p>Noticing: Less politically intense cue</p> <p><i>...it comes from my experience of working on this particular piece of work and the role that I've got across [this] policy more broadly. It was coming to a realisation... It came through the work that we were doing with one of the groups for the sector...</i></p>	<p><i>Now, the way that has been done has, to some extent, been opportunistic: <u>when circumstances arise</u> and... you know broadly where you want to get to within a very broad and possibly a somewhat misty vision, but <u>when circumstances arise</u>, you take advantage of them.</i></p>
<p>Logics: Dominant logics of reform</p> <p>As table A.1 plus Stewardship:</p> <p><i>That's that fine art of <u>stewardship</u>, is when you can actually nudge in a direction that the government doesn't even realise it's going, contrary to its own.</i></p>	<p>As table A.1</p>
<p>Intrinsic factors: Governance role conception</p> <p><i>I'm taking a <u>system view</u> to this, so I'm working <u>right across the system</u>, both in terms of the public service, and then <u>reaching into</u> [sector]</i></p>	<p><i>... we have multiplicity of objectives and a multiplicity of pressures and you have to be prepared to be flexible and to understand that although there may be an overall goal, it is <u>certainly not a straight line</u> in order to get from where you want to where you're going... The role of government is to <u>improve the quality of life</u> of the people it's serving. And in a sense, that <u>reveals the ambiguity</u> because how you improve the quality of life? How you <u>interpret the quality of life</u>? What are the <u>components</u> you're seeking to improve? Are they all in alignment - no?</i></p>
<p>Intrinsic factors: Personal mission</p> <p><i>I felt that very personally for a long time, and when I was in the [department], I worked very carefully to massage the minister, to think about [this challenge].</i></p>	<p><i>...it comes right back to what we started talking about you know, <u>about why I'm here</u> and <u>where I came from</u>. I've always maintained my contact with the universities. Of course my [relationship] is a very senior academic on [academic field]; my [relationship] is a senior academic; I talk frequently to [Professor name] and also to other academics in London, people like [university name], that sort of thing... So, I think <u>one of my own contributions</u> in this whole process has been to get into the bloodstream here some of the academic thinking about all of this and also, frankly, help to inform some of that academic</i></p>

Table A.2: Summary data table for Mode B and steward leadership

Example connected quotations (NZ)	Example connected quotations (Wales)
	<i>thinking</i>
<p>Intrinsic factors: Independent standing</p> <p><i>So we have, through the recent revisions to the State Sector Act, been given explicit permission to take on a <u>stewardship approach</u> in our work. Now stewardship is potentially a little bit dangerous for us; Ministers will see it as public servants having their own agenda... <u>What we see ourselves as doing is having that long view on issues.</u></i></p>	<p><i>... you know, we're talking to the relevant people there [in the elected body]. But also sort of rather more informal processes. I mean, <u>I'm quite well known down there, having done this for 20 years...</u> bump into people and we have a chat & that sort of thing</i></p> <p><i><u>I talk frequently to [leading academics], that sort of thing ...when [a key event happened], civil society was united in support of the arguments that we had been putting forward. [contrasting his with another government team]: ...was actually <u>un-networked</u>, had no knowledge or understanding of who were the opinion-formers.</u></i></p>
<p>Framing: More equivocal ministerial direction</p> <p><i>About 18 months ago, she <u>commissioned</u> us to lead some work... That's <u>where the fun began</u>, because in <u>her</u> sense ... [this delivery partner] was not operating effectively at all, in fact it was mostly incompetent, and we needed at the centre to improve ways of working, and that included quite a punitive approach to publishing performance information... So it was sort of <u>game on</u> really, and we were ... in their view I suppose those dreadful people in the middle who are <u>carrying out the Ministers instructions</u>, but clearly not to be trusted ... because again my job was to advise [the] minister where there were compromises we thought they could make.</i></p>	<p><i>You are facing directly to the politicians and interpreting what they say and there, I think, the most important skill is the ability <u>to listen, and to interpret, and then to be able to work with ambiguity</u>... Ministers are faced with so many challenges and so many pressures coming from so many different directions that <u>you will never get that sort of clarity</u> and therefore, you have <u>ambiguity</u>...</i></p>
<p>Framing: Legitimacy</p> <p>Legitimacy of action: <i>This is the speech I gave to the Minister: "Minister, you and your colleagues are here to improve the quality of life for [people], [delivery partners] are there to improve the quality of life for their communities. At the end of the day, you've got the same outcomes in common and it's about a better [country]. We need to work together to achieve that"</i></p> <p>Legitimacy of agency: <i>Absolutely, that's me taking a very strong stewardship role over this set of issues. It's not</i></p>	<p>Legitimacy of action: <i>I've been doing the different phases of [that policy] <u>as consensus has arisen</u> for further development of it.</i></p> <p>Legitimacy of agency: <i>I've stayed in that field ever since and you know, for the <u>last 20 years</u> really... <u>I'm quite well known [amongst politicians of all parties], having done</u></i></p>

Table A.2: Summary data table for Mode B and steward leadership

Example connected quotations (NZ)	Example connected quotations (Wales)
<i>just about the relationship, it's about the set of issues that arise at the interface...</i>	<i>this for 20 years... [see also independent standing above]</i>
<p>Framing: As a governance challenge</p> <p><i>...we've, in my department got a really difficult relationship with the sector.... Here we are, trying to work right across government on a whole lot of critical policy issues... re-setting the relationship, re-working the interface, because there are so many points of intersection...</i></p>	<p><i>What I'm... I've been doing effectively over the last 10 or 15 years is a continual process of development, and the long term objective of the process is to secure a... an effective [governance system] with a wide range of policy tools and capacities</i></p>
<p>Responding: Steward leadership</p> <p>Re-framing, influencing: <i>...that was me actually deciding "Here's and opportunity, this is really important", and I was working to kind of get up a minister from a political party who was not going to be keen to do what the previously government had done, in relationship to [this challenge] ... well, into [this challenge].</i></p> <p>Creating ministerial permission: <i>What I'm doing then also, with Ministers ... is finding those pieces of policy work. Getting the permission to actually then collaborate much more with [delivery partners] across a spectrum of policy pieces.</i></p> <p>Refocusing own resources: <i>I'm also re-structuring my policy group, which covers many, many things. I'm wanting to really build up the capability and capacity in my [subject] team...</i></p>	<p>Re-framing, influencing: <i>I think one of my own contributions in this whole process has been to get into the bloodstream here some of the academic thinking about all of this and also, frankly, help to inform some of that academic thinking.</i></p> <p>Creating ministerial permission: <i>...on the whole, Ministers have dealt with this on an ad hoc pragmatic basis, as issues have been presented to them. I have done most of the thinking about this and written most of the Ministers' speeches, the big picture type of things... But basically, I've done it.</i></p> <p>Refocusing own resources: <i>[not mentioned in this case]</i></p>

Table A.3: Extended data table

First order categories	Second order themes (with representative quotations)	Case source
DOMINANT LOGICS OF REFORM		
Austerity	<i>As Mike told you yesterday the demand is going up, the cost pressure is going up, expectations are going up and there's a finite budget.</i>	25
	<i>The strategic challenge is the financial context? Knowing that whatever we do, at the moment we need to drive services in a better way, to do more within the resources that we have?</i>	31
	<i>In times of austerity, which is where we still are, and reducing civil service...</i>	8
	<i>... austerity and ... there's people's willingness to increase the level of taxation to do more, against a backdrop of huge increasing demand from – victim of our own success – an ageing population...</i>	9
	<i>the issues predate the manifesto and they start with the austerity measures that have been in place since... [the] financial crash 2008, and the drive to reshape public services quite dramatically considerably - slightly a different approach in Wales than UK but you know, driven by the funding.</i>	16
	<i>Declining resources, fewer staff, greater demands from ministers to do policy.</i>	4
	<i>... it is one of our areas of comparative advantage, I think, is a small government service - most of the people work here, live in Wales, have Welsh roots, have got an understanding of the country, potential strength in terms of their identification with the work that they are doing</i>	13
Collaboration / opportunity of devolution	<i>... actually, a greater demand to make sure that as a government, or as a public service, we're not doing things that are inconsistent, incompatible, or you know simply working against one another, is now really, really great. So, one of our key roles is: working across departments, understanding what's going on around the rest of the government</i>	4
	<i>...collaboration starts with the frontline... ...wanting to push people into kind of different models of collaboration... ...So although there's a spirit of collaboration... ...when we're looking for people to act differently or use, you know, terms like collaborative leadership, you can definitely show a path but you need... you need to not be the only person doing it... ... the worst thing for me would be only where I go collaboration happens...</i>	31
Collaboration	<i>Try and encourage some working together more... working across Welsh government is... is quite a challenge for a number of people... I think, because they'll be very used to those, you know, single silo links to ministers</i>	12
	<i>... I think if Wales is to stand on its own two feet we need a confident lead from government and I am not quite sure we are in that place yet and yet with the whole Wales Bill there's such a huge opportunity now to shape the future. If we don't do it this summer, we quite have lost it for a generation?</i>	8
	<i>With our new powers in Wales, when necessary... [we are able] to create the legislation that actually allows the difference to work through...</i>	31
The opportunity of devolution		

First order categories	Second order themes (with representative quotations)	Case source
	<i>Wales with its public service ethos...</i>	9
	<i>So I've been pushing colleagues quite hard... saying that we ought to seek devolution of [a policy area], as part of the next round of devolution.</i>	15
Stewardship	<i>There's a sort of a stewardship role for the wider system as a whole, which is essentially long-sighted.</i>	24
	<i>A senior public servant is somebody who has two roles, one of which is advising ministers and the government of the day, and one of which is to cultivate the system so that it's able to, what we call stewardship, the system, able to advise governments of tomorrow...</i>	17
	<i>This is not a fundamental change to the Minister-public servant contract, it's the art of being a strategic [senior public servant] – needs attention to timing, to content, and to the government's agenda</i>	34
	<i>That's that fine art of stewardship, is when you can actually nudge in a direction that the government doesn't even realise it's going, contrary to its own. ...that's me taking a very strong stewardship role over this set of interface issues... I'm taking a system view to this, so I'm working right across the system, both in terms of the public service, and then reaching into [sector]</i>	32
Systems thinking, outcome focus	<i>So, that has got to be a system response. It can't be a programme response or a project response. It's got to be fundamental, and so part of this challenge is, how do we align the entire, not just public sector, how do we align the wider systems...</i>	24
	<i>...the kinds of statement that we got to agree with [central government leaders] were things like, "we'll move from sectors to systems". What does that mean? ...we've started to make them more concrete...</i>	6
	<i>So what we need is, we think we need, to address this strategic issue, is a dual operating model. So keep the benefits of our current operating model, but we devise a citizen centred collective impact model that we can fund for that quadrant.</i>	18
	<i>And I said, "Fine, look it's not me talking, it's the future talking at you. I'm just channelling. All right?"... do you realise how fast the future is here?</i>	33
	<i>"Okay, so how do I organise a system that incentivizes long run outcomes where I don't have any performance indicators and I'm making long term commitments for the future with uncertain outcomes?"</i>	24
POLITICAL INTENSITY OF CUE		
Higher intensity cue	<i>New minister was happy to continue going and the global financial crisis happened... it was a very messy situation where there was a demand ... I guess the challenge was, there's a demand to do some[thing] ... What can we do quickly? What are some short term fixes?</i>	19
	<i>Overnight suddenly one year [a service delivery agency] went to massive deficit. So the Minister of the day called me to say, "So you know how this thing work, fix it." And so I said, "Okay."</i>	33
	<i>...it is undoubtedly, people have described it as one of the biggest peacetime challenges ever having faced [the country]... it's certainly got to be up there.</i>	36

First order categories	Second order themes (with representative quotations)	Case source
Lower intensity cue	<i>I think for a lot of us that have been in this game for quite a long time it felt like, you know, a very startling refreshment of the - what did you call it Megan? - the public policy challenge.</i>	13
	<i>Now, the way that has been done has, to some extent, been opportunistic: when circumstances arise and... you know broadly where you want to get to within a very broad and possibly a somewhat misty vision, but when circumstances arise, you take advantage of them.</i>	38
	<i>...it's simply that this confluence of events around the world and the suddenness with which they've happened, coupled with the fact that we haven't seen anything in [this country] yet, makes it a worry rather than a sort of burning fire that needs to be addressed.</i>	17
	<i>...for quite a long time that's been something that [team A] and [team B] were thinking about as a potential issue and we started investing some more time in it...</i>	19
SPS ROLE CONCEPTION		
Professional manager	<i>I think the role of government is to translate the democratically elected representatives, to translate their policy wishes, mandate, into action. Simple .</i>	25
	<i>I was a national director for a big operation ... [I] created a bit of a conundrum for the system because we now had people in the Ministry who understood how the system worked.</i>	33
	<i>Well, actually when I'm outside, I usually say I'm the Chief Executive [rather than a SPS] because that seems to be the most straight forward area and probably the role most people validate me for...</i>	31
	<i>...it was quite a difficult period because we had to make things happen and therefore my role became much more interventionist on the sector because I knew how the sector worked... we didn't write a lot of papers, we just made phone calls... "I'm calling to say, "I know you know I know", so let's get on with this. So fix it, or we'll fix it for you. That simple."</i>	33
	<i>So [Minister name] let's say wants to do something about 'innovation', to improve the way in which we support it. That's what she said. It seems to me, we now need to give her a few, you know, '20 ways in which you could improve innovation', rather than wait for her to tell us how she wants to improve innovation.</i>	12
	<i>The role of a senior civil servant is to lead and coordinate functions, policy areas, on behalf of ministers to deliver the program for government. That's the essence of it.</i>	16
Governance	<i>A senior public servant is somebody who has two roles, one of which is advising ministers and the government of the day, and one of which is to cultivate the system so that it's able to, what we call stewardship, the system, able to advise governments of tomorrow.</i>	17
	<i>Yeah, well basically all of the things we work on are essentially complex systems which have suffered from having very diverse policy and institutional and legislative frameworks which don't reflect the fact that they are one system, or a series of interlocking systems.</i>	29
	<i>... we have multiplicity of objectives and a multiplicity of pressures and you have to be prepared to be flexible and to understand that although there may be an overall goal, it is certainly not a straight line in order to get from where you want to where you're going...</i>	38

First order categories	Second order themes (with representative quotations)	Case source
	<i>It's to provide direction and stewardship. Senior public servants are there to serve the government of the day, to provide advice to them to deliver on their agenda. I take from that and bring back ... This organisation provides direction to this organisation to do that, while also keeping an eye on a longer term view, which is I need this organisation to be viable and healthy and important and relevant for a longer period of time than just delivering on an immediate mandate as well.</i>	21
	<i>Absolutely, that's me taking a very strong stewardship role over this set of issues. It's not just about the relationship, it's about the set of issues that arise at the interface</i>	32
	<i>So we want to strengthen the institutional, or the constitutional and institutional underpinnings of the State</i>	18
INDIVIDUAL MISSION		
Professional	<i>I always sort of have hankering to go back to my roots and this is a bit like going back to bit to [a previous job], getting out again and finding out how lots of different organization do stuff. Absolutely fascinating, love it!</i>	28
	<i>Part of the reason I came back – well, if I had known what it was like I may have reconsidered - but it was really in search of a leadership [post].</i>	24
	<i>I think first of all, I've been a public servant all my career. It's been the only choice I've ever wanted to make. I like the complexity of the issues and obviously working with public issues...</i>	3
	<i>... I had a sense I could actually be a chief executive... So I have a personal coach... he said, "[Name], you need to have a better imagination and creativity if you are to lead" ...I said, "Yes, that's very logical. I get that... Tell me how to fix it now." ...And that's been my journey for the last four years.</i>	33
	<i>I thought... 'I want to run something now'... It's like a command. I treat it as a command.</i>	7
Personal	<i>I felt that very personally for a long time, and when I was in the [department], I worked very carefully to massage the minister, to think about [this challenge].</i>	32
	<i>I have my own personal passions about equity and equality, and disadvantage just from my own personal experience as well, that I felt like I could make a difference... I did work years ago at [team], which was my place I really wanted to be, but I realised they don't have the power and influence that [this team] does, so I can do my work better here.</i>	3
	<i>...it comes right back to what we started talking about you know, about why I'm here and where I came from...</i>	38
	<i>...at another level I have also got a [religious] background which I can deny as much as like but I still have this... hair shirt that if you are not hurting you're not hurting yourself enough! That sort of thing, the personal dimension comes into it too.</i>	25
	<i>I have to put on the table being [the senior leader] didn't count. I didn't wake up one wanting to be a [senior leader]: I wanted to wake up to make a difference. When you look at my value set, the role doesn't matter. For my colleagues, that's different. You read it through that lens of actually it gave me a spot to get to some tables. Cool. D'you know?</i>	2

First order categories	Second order themes (with representative quotations)	Case source
	<p>Interviewer: ...Because you have so many things [on your radar], what's made you notice <u>this</u> challenge? What's driving it?</p> <p>Interviewee: I bring my priors to that. The fact that I've worked in and around [policy], worked with [a particular community] a lot... In working in [policy], you have the privilege of being exposed to things that other [people] aren't. In communities, their lives and things they do.</p>	21
INDEPENDENT STANDING		
By ref. to legislative basis of stewardship	<p>A senior public servant is somebody who has two roles, one of which is advising ministers and the government of the day, and one of which is to cultivate the system so that it's able to, what we call stewardship, the system, able to advise governments of tomorrow... I think there is an element of that, which is around participating in the public discourse in a way such that the public and the commentariat and so on are able to play some of that role too, so that the conditions remain fertile for sensible policy debate, in a liberal democracy...</p>	17
	<p>There is another role [for senior public servants] under the new Public Finance Act, which is a stewardship role... So, we have a role independent of the current government around the sustainability of the public service and the sectors that we're responsible for... It has more of an effect in theory than in practise, so it's still viewed as a new provision. It's still honoured in the breach, more than in the effect.</p>	10
	<p>That's that fine art of stewardship, is when you can actually nudge in a direction that the government doesn't even realise it's going, contrary to its own.</p>	32
By ref. to independent standing	<p>... I'm quite well known [amongst politicians of all parties], having done this for 20 years... And you know, I bump into people and we have a chat & that sort of thing.</p> <p>I talk frequently to [leading academics], that sort of thing ...when [a key event happened], civil society was united in support of the arguments that we had been putting forward.</p>	38
	<p>Well, actually when I'm outside, I usually say I'm [title] because that seems to be the most straight forward area and probably the role most people <u>validate</u> me for...</p>	31
	<p>And when we launched the draft strategy it was very interesting, [name - <u>high profile international academic</u>] tweeted almost within the hour, that we released the draft: "[the country] just released a draft strategy. Interesting things, something there for others to look at"... Then in June last year, two months after we launched, we had a big event and <u>an American guy came out from the [name - different high profile international academic] stable</u>. And at breakfast he said to me, "Did you take our materials?... when we read your strategy it looks very similar to our materials." I said, "I have no idea what you're talking about, I never read your materials"... <u>it [the strategy] had a big resounding affirmation from the sector and from the community.</u></p>	33
	<p>As a professional lead my job is to improve the quality of our advice... What allows me to hold firm? That is professionalism... Some of that's my internal belief, but it's also my network of economists... It's now what's sustaining me and it is professionalism. Some of that's my internal belief, but it's also my network of [colleagues in same profession]... I don't draw on them much, but just a mutual rolling of the eyes, or a very occasional, "Keep fighting the good fight."</p>	10

First order categories	Second order themes (with representative quotations)	Case source
	<i>we've obviously got our international networks... And yeah, we are at the cutting edge of most of this work.</i>	29
By ref. to professional career	<i>I had already been a [senior role], I've run [big organisation], had a lot of [big projects], et cetera... For all of us who are in this, and I'm probably getting fairly long in the tooth...</i>	7
	<i>... so I spent my first 11 years with what is now [company]...About five, six years in I rose through the ranks...then ...chief operating officer, as well as doing all these other roles... I became acting chief officer on this for seven months, and we went through two radical reforms in the seven months I was there... then I had a sense I could actually be a chief executive... And we did some fantastic things and I had complete trust [with] the board... they realised that I was outgrowing my role. And they mentored me to do a range of regional, national roles, which I did... And I was asked to apply for a role in the [government]</i>	33
	<i>So, I'm a [sector] manager by background and I am still, technically, a [sector] manager because I'm on secondment for the period of this tenure, so it means I've not abandoned my... my, kind of, background and I guess that's the thing I'm most comfortable with.</i>	31
EQUIVOCALITY OF MINISTERIAL DIRECTION		
More equivocal	<i>You are facing directly to the politicians and interpreting what they say and there, I think, the most important skill is the ability to listen, and to interpret, and then to be able to work with ambiguity... we don't have simple, straightforward objective, we have multiplicity of objectives and a multiplicity of pressures and you have to be prepared to be flexible and to understand that although there may be an overall goal, it is certainly not a straight line in order to get from where you want to where you're going... Ministers are faced with so many challenges and so many pressures coming from so many different directions that you will never get that sort of clarity and therefore, you have ambiguity...</i>	38
	<i>[This challenge] might not have a lot of direct, strong, political support for the long-term strategic goal...</i>	21
	<i>About 18 months ago, she commissioned us to lead some work... That's where the fun began... So it was sort of game on really, and we were ... in their view I suppose those dreadful people in the middle who are carrying out the Ministers instructions, but clearly not to be trusted (32)</i>	32
	<i>[The minister] went to [a public event]... [a famous expert] gave an impassioned talk... [The minister] had been giving a speech that was referring to all the work that we were doing around the big system approach and the setting - instead he said, "something must be done!" ...So that sort of slightly diverted the work of the group and what I needed to do was to keep it within the frame of what we were trying to do in policy terms. So we up set up the nature fund.</i>	29
	<i>Ultimately, we serve the minister of the day, not the public. Although it's a complex relationship because as public servants we obviously serve the public, but through the minister who takes the decisions.</i>	3
	<i>There's issues of political appetite, I guess, to reflect on. Managers, bureaucrats, professionals can get their heads around these issues but actually, there's another leap on these things sometimes, about politicians being prepared for the change that I might bring.</i>	31

First order categories	Second order themes (with representative quotations)	Case source
	<i>[The Minister] had been giving a speech that was referring to all the work that we were doing around the big system approach and the setting... instead he said, "something must be done"... So my job was then to try and create something that used that money sensibly in advancing the agenda</i>	29
Less equivocal	<i>And I said, "...We've got a government which has been elected with a mandate that says we are doing this. So the answer is we're doing it. How we do it is the issue; we don't have to discuss all this kind of stuff [about whether to do it]"</i>	25
	<i>So, I've previously run large organizations, I'm now in a large organization, but my role to run it is in a very different capacity because the ministerial direction kind of dominates?</i>	31
	<i>I'm in the good position where the minister, where the evidence lines up with what the government wants to do.</i>	10
	<i>So where is the minister on this? Well, clearly it's a manifesto commitment, hugely supportive, but is just expecting us to get on with it really.</i>	9
	<i>We have a Minister that's incredibly ambitious, he wanted his [team] to deliver all of it</i>	24
	<i>I think it was driven by issues, so: a disgruntled minister... what are we going to do about it? ...some very high profile external negative press, and a charge from the minister to [colleague] and I: 'sort it out'</i>	16
	<i>the Minister of the day actually got me to intervene more and more</i>	33
	<i>So, the government wanted to look at the effectiveness and how fit for purpose our [subject] system was.</i>	20
LEGITIMACY		
Legitimacy of action	<i>I think I will always probably start from the basis of a public servant needing to work out what's the... what's the right thing to do</i>	12
	<i>This is the speech I gave to the Minister: "Minister, you and your colleagues are here to improve the quality of life for [people], [delivery partners] are there to improve the quality of life for their communities. At the end of the day, you've got the same outcomes in common and it's about a better [country]. We need to work together to achieve that"...</i>	32
	<i>[To a different audience]: We've got to re-set this relationship, it's unseemly, and it doesn't do for the sector to see what they see as what they think is us squabbling. We've got to find a different way of working."</i>	
	<i>So we are somewhat data blind and anecdote rich... that the [delivery partners] will continue to say "we are over busy, we can't cope"... We'll say, "well are you? We think you are..." But how can you plan a system?</i>	25
	<i>The other insight we had was – leaping onto that - that underneath this, there is a degree of evidence.</i>	
	<i>Because if it's the right thing for individuals...</i>	31
	<i>...when we know each other, we know the outcomes to be achieved, we've got a clear direction for the future and actually, international evidence demonstrates that when public services integrate and work together, one should assume that it's a better outcome for citizens</i>	31
	<i>One of the principles that [this] policy has been predicated on for a long time is that one way to achieve that is to have a general philosophy of openness in the economy... Actually, [the country] has been, I think, widely praised by international counterparts for its [particular] approach...</i>	17

First order categories	Second order themes (with representative quotations)	Case source
Legitimacy of agency	<i>...there's certainly a current of expectation that the government, from some quarters, that's not universal at all, but in some quarters that the government should [respond in a certain way]. Lots of countries do this.</i>	17
	<i>We've been talking to a lot of people over the last year and a half, just inviting people in to share ideas. Out of that we really came at how rapidly the world is changing, and the type of challenges that we're facing. Therefore, this is a good time. So those things came together and said we need to comprehensively refresh our strategy.</i>	3
	<i>I've stayed in that field ever since and you know, for the last 20 years really, I've been doing the different phases of [that policy] as consensus have arisen for further development of it.</i>	38
	<i>I guess one interesting aspect that I'll be interested to see when you write it up is, I suppose it goes back to your question about what is a senior public servant. Obviously it's a pretty ill defined concept and people have their own sense of identity, depending on where they are in the public service, I suppose... I think there's something about how do we personally navigate our sense of privilege to be in this position, where we have the duty and opportunity to do things that are quite consequential for our fellow citizens. We're not elected... I don't have, nobody has ... My employment contract is very vague, put it that way... I have to create my own mandate, and I think public servants, senior public servants have to grapple with that.</i>	17
	<i>Interviewee: I bring my priors to that. The fact that I've worked in and around [this challenge] a lot... For me it stands out, in part because of priors...</i>	21
	<i>Interviewer: ...would I be right in assuming that you have a status, individual from that work that helps you to do this?</i>	
	<i>Interviewee: Yes... that's right. Yes, it does help, without a doubt. I bring personal cache, and we get both a bit more buy in support, but also we get given a bit more, we get cut some slack if that makes sense?</i>	
	<i>My mandate is to bring a [subject] perspective so how can I support a minister to bring it in to do that.</i>	2
	<i>Well, actually when I'm outside, I usually say I'm [title] because that seems to be the most straight forward area and probably the role most people validate me for...</i>	31
	<i>So, although a bureaucrat, I seem to have managed to get myself in the "if I speak, people see me as speaking reasonably, sensibly on issues in a reasonably normal kind of a manner", rather than only being there defending ministers. Even though I haven't lost that role either.</i>	
	<i>Interviewer: So what makes it a strategic issue for you currently?</i>	29
	<i>Interviewee: Well, because it is the fundamental issue for this department, you know</i>	
	<i>...So I am not alone in terms of the way in which we need to approach this and there are other people that are looking out for these things. But ultimately often it is me.</i>	
	<i>I've stayed in that field ever since and you know, for the last 20 years really, I've been doing the different phases of [that policy] as consensus have arisen for further development of it.</i>	38
	<i>... I'm quite well known down there, having done this for 20 years.</i>	
KEY LOCUS OF CHALLENGE		

First order categories	Second order themes (with representative quotations)	Case source
Delivery	<i>Interviewer: So your & [your colleague's] diagnosis that it was that management had chosen poor tactics, or was it just general management capacity?</i>	16
	<i>Interviewee: More the general management capacity.</i>	
	<i>I think I'm working in a much more interventionist environment in terms of me needing to discharge some of the [service] expectations for ministers than has been the case before... sometimes, it just comes to the point of somebody needing to call it? ... it's probably colleagues who I now work alongside, needing to get themselves to the arena of understanding now we are now pulling levers in a different way.... So I have got a line management oversight of the NHS that helps me, and I can try to pull the levers</i>	31
	<i>... how broad do you go and how do you actually operationalize this in a practical in a practical concrete sense... how do we align the entire, not just public sector, how do we align the wider systems that includes your NGOs, your other support mechanisms, to deal with some of these complex sides.</i>	24
	<i>But I think also public sector reform, we miss fundamentally the discussion and the investigation of where are the incentives lying? What does the specific system say, versus how people will behave?</i>	3
	<i>I was tasked with implementing change operationally which came out from the recommendation review group</i>	33
	<i>I talked to [the service delivery agency]; I said, "Look, we know each other very well, here's the bottom line. I don't know all the details, but I can get to them real quick. The Minister wants to give you the chance to fix this, if you fail to fix it, [we] will be coming in to fix it for you."</i>	33
Governance	<i>...a strategic framework issue, and that is gaining the confidence of the public, and stakeholders. We're doing that through strengthening the organisation.</i>	7
	<i>I think the bigger challenge now really is the more I look at, more I look at organisational change in [the sector], the more concerned I get... Because you got lots of different very valid principles that aren't joined up?</i>	28
	<i>... how as a government, as [a sector], and actually as a society do we respond to that? Okay. So that's the challenge.</i>	9
	<i>What I'm... I've been doing effectively over the last 10 or 15 years is a continual process of development, and the long term objective of the process is to secure a... an effective [governance system] with a wide range of policy tools and capacities</i>	38
	<i>You can imagine the politics around this... We had to find a way, I guess using your 'sense making', of supporting [the Minister] to frame this in a way that she could engage with two very senior ministers about why this was one on a political level which they're going to need to address</i>	2
	<i>...the political symptoms of a backlash aren't evident... But I don't think we can be complacent about that. The way that [an earlier initiative] was done, we actually got, some of the agencies got a little bit startled by the push-back from certain sections of the community, some parts of the community. I don't think that push-back was entirely groundless, because we are moving in to a world where people do have an expectation that government will be conducted in public more and more, and there'll be meaningful consultation etc. Not only that, the public has an ability to leverage its irritation and its voice much more than they did previously, and in potentially quite destructive ways. We've seen it.</i>	17

First order categories	Second order themes (with representative quotations)	Case source
	<i>The [strategic challenge] that continuously stands out for me is... the position of [a community] in our society and economy.</i>	21
	AGENDA LEADERSHIP	
Leading & designing strategic response	<i>My role was primarily one of driving the system, having the insights but the vision bit that's gone, but driving the system and help keep the momentum actually going</i>	25
	<i>... that leap of faith also takes guts because that could go wrong, and that was a decision I took... And even that one experiment has proved a lot of enthusiasm.</i>	25
	<i>So, I think you can come at it on a number of ways but one should really drive it from the fact that, bluntly, we can have a better individual citizen experience...and, and by the way, surely it must be smarter use of resources.</i>	31
	<i>There's one challenge at the moment about a regional template... we know the best outcomes are gonna be achieved when the whole [service] system is linked together in the right way</i>	31
	<i>The simple challenge is what is the [subject] strategy for public services? How do we develop and define that over the next year or so?</i>	12
	<i>My role with [delivery partners], I am challenging them in our joint executive meetings that we have with each of [them], so that's my role. I also chair a partnership board that involves all the stakeholders on [subject] more broadly, and it is bringing it up the agenda there.</i>	9
	<i>We created a steering group... And they are charged with coming up with the proposal by the end of the calendar year... And we've had three meetings, a bunch of work going on in between... We are commissioning bits of work... but also a lot of this is about engaging with individuals as well.</i>	16
	<i>... So we agreed that we could do it and we set up a little establishment unit to establish a new [organisation]</i>	19
	<i>So that means I'm going to need to work out a way of coordinating it; I know it's going to cost me a lot of money, but I'm prepared to do that... My role was to match the resources, free them up, do the thinking, do the leadership, say this is important, come up with an alternative, and because my role is sort of a cross agency one it's also to play the working across government role.</i>	24
	<i>it was quite a difficult period because we had to make things happen and therefore my role became much more interventionist on the sector because I knew how the sector worked. So the Minister of the day actually got me to intervene more and more with ... it created a lot of friction with the sector.</i>	33
	<i>So basically we designed a process, we basically did it to the [delivery partners]... So basically we designed a programme, which actually had very good principles.</i>	33
	<i>We're not going to go out there and create mayhem and chaos, but we're very deliberate around structure. But very careful around making sure you don't actually turn the system upside down with unintended consequences, right?</i>	33
	<i>... I was in 12 months of turnaround. Because they know what we are capable of doing it, so we moved in. And we've done that a number of times...</i>	33

First order categories	Second order themes (with representative quotations)	Case source
Face of the agenda for stake-holders	<i>So what we've done is we have been quite deliberate in our conversation with the sector, with the public service....</i>	33
	<i>So we had a symposium...And then I hosted the dinner. And invited 20 organisations from the sector.</i>	
	<i>And to be part of cojoling, supporting... I can go to national events and broker that myself and participate</i>	31
	<i>When I've been going out to talk to people externally, it's been much more with a view that... what I'm here to do is to listen to what you have to say about way things are at the moment... I'm going to a meeting tomorrow in [place] with a number of [delivery partners], we're hoping to encourage them</i>	12
	<i>Just that constant engagement with the sector so that they bought into it... We were just accessible and available and we would meet with anyone who wanted to meet with us.</i>	19
	<i>I spend a lot of time talking to the sister agencies... Part of the nature of my role too is it's very much a system role, so a lot of what I do is working across that system wider. So working with partner agencies out there.</i>	24
	<i>My personal role has been in coordinating leadership [across the sector]</i>	25
Challenging own organisation	<i>I said this morning talking to a few business people... I'm also dealing with the industry... I would talk to some of the Chief Executives...</i>	7
	<i>This place inside here is a sausage factory, and it likes churning out action plans? So my work was cutting down drafts of 100 pages to 20-odd – 'we are not going to say... we are going to do this'.</i>	25
	<i>So I think there's something about our practice through our [organisation] structures needing to change as people breakthrough from quite a traditional mode?... I also think there's a bit of a challenge to the [organisation itself] about how it changes its model of service?</i>	31
	<i>So for me it's to kick the work off, make sure the time table and the approach is right, you know, so is it consultative enough? who are they involving? how are they going to take this through a process? what are the key things we need to address?... So it's the strategic direction of the approach.</i>	9
	<i>I'm also bringing a lot more effort I think into the internal organization side as well, because I just don't think that we've been in very good shape. I can see some areas that we need to go... The current constraints are the areas of internal resource allocation.</i>	24
	<i>I'm quite demanding on the [department] in terms of asking them to lead by example: change, so start. We're doing a lot of work internally about this and pushing ourselves quite hard.</i>	33
	<i>We're doing that through strengthening the organisation. We've had to make quite a lot of changes on what was originally put together, we've moved parts of the organisations, its called a realignment, which I started within about six months of being here. It's the old saying, "If you don't like change then try irrelevancy."</i>	7

First order categories	Second order themes (with representative quotations)	Case source
Delivery focussed Ministerial reporting	<i>I think the key thing for us as government is to be able to demonstrate that we've made progress? ...what we have to be able to demonstrate is that we are making things better, that the stuff is going in the right direction... I mean she's [the Minister's] regularly asked about this in plenary... we've said when we will do it by, we've set it out...we will be updating her actually on where we on the range of manifesto commitments in the next month or so. But that's the norm. A Minister has a huge agenda, you know, that's it.</i>	9
	<i>We posed the issue, highlighted the issue [to Ministers]; the decision to [do what was recommended] became a political decision. Implementing that, the strategic thinking and discussion, is now in part within this steering group [I am part of].</i>	16
	<i>Sometimes he'd say, "Well, can you give me a two page note on it?" or, "yeah that's fine," or, "what does [the sector] say? Go and check with these people and tell me." But as I said earlier, once I'd done that a few times, I got a really good sense that most of the time I could judge that for myself and he was very willing just to let us get on with it.</i>	19
	<i>It's got an interesting concept to it, but I don't think it's the answer... [and] that became the ethos of what this was, at least in the minister's view... It was interesting trying to steer that in a different direction and I don't think we've fully succeeded yet, but the real challenge to us back [from the minister] was "Okay wise guy, give me an alternative because that's my idea." ... I do think there is something in the concept. Nobody in the world's done anything like this. It's got to be a system response... It's got to be fundamental... it's not just saying get together in a coordination issue, it's actually thinking, "How would I structure the wider government system to actually deliver that?" And when you think about it, that's quite profound and quite challenging because it's quite different</i>	24
	<i>So the Minister of the day called me to say, "So you know how this thing work, fix it." And so I said, "Okay."</i>	33
	<i>It was to, in the first instance, always monitor the performance; where performance slipped, we would discuss with ministers and ministers would say, "Do you think they can do it?"... In the event they struggled, then we would need to step in.</i>	33
	<i>I spend a lot of time with Ministers, and reassuring them... Talking through the budgets, talking through why we're doing this, we've had several sessions on that.</i>	7
STEWARD LEADERSHIP		
Creating Ministerial permission	<i>My personal role has been taking opportunity in as many fora as I can, including directly with the new Minister to say, "Minister, you and your colleagues are here to improve the quality of life for [people], [delivery partners] are there to improve the quality of life for their communities. At the end of the day, you've got the same outcomes in common and it's about a better [country]. We need to work together to achieve that", and she totally understood it, and bought it.</i>	32
	<i>Interviewer: But now you're starting to try and set the agenda? Interviewee: I think it's always been part of our job, and I always have, but there's ways you do this.</i>	21
	<i>That's that fine art of stewardship, when you can actually nudge in a direction that the government doesn't even realise it's going, contrary to its own.</i>	32

First order categories	Second order themes (with representative quotations)	Case source
	<i>...that was me actually deciding "Here's an opportunity, this is really important", and I was working to kind of get up a minister from a political party who was not going to be keen to do what the previous government had done, in relationship to [this challenge] ... well, into [this challenge].</i>	32
	<i>I think I've held the ring on this for the period. There are others where I would say that wasn't the case, that it was a politically held one, but that's partly why I picked this one [example] because I think it has been me... The set of issues & the principles remain the same, the issue is how each particular Minister wants to prioritize or focus that approach</i>	29
	<i>...on the whole, Ministers have dealt with this on an ad hoc pragmatic basis, as issues have been presented to them. I have done most of the thinking about this and written most of the Ministers' speeches, the big picture type of things... But basically, I've done it.</i>	38
	<i>This in some ways, this is the nack of the job, which is ...It might not have a lot of direct, strong, political support for the long-term strategic goal, but it can be aligned and worked around the priorities that they have... There's a framing piece that you can do to make it fit, if you like.</i>	21
Reframing, influencing	<i>... the interesting thing was really how we changed that into an [x] dialogue and not a [y] dialogue</i>	29
	<i>One is just exerting your will over the process and I often say one of the things you've got is your personal will and influence. So things drift, things go off in different directions, things lose the plot – we are very poor at holding the intellectual framing of something - and a lot of what I do in these circumstances is to keep the sense of why we are doing this, and what fits and what doesn't. And I will do that through being SRO to things, or chairing groups to just bring us back to "this is what it is about and that's not, that doesn't fit" if you like.</i>	29
	<i>I think one of my own contributions in this whole process has been to get into the bloodstream here some of the academic thinking about all of this and also, frankly, help to inform some of that academic thinking.</i>	38
	<i>... what one is trying to do is make other people think, and change the way they think, and also give them a narrative, if you like, that they can then promote... I look for opportunities to do that, because we spend a lot of time engaging with other senior leaders, and so I sort of view it as being somewhere near the apex of our pyramid. You're just trying to use those channels to get people talking about the right stuff in an evidence and fact informed way.</i>	17
	<i>It's influence. Your senior leaders are influencing. How do you create an environment where a good debate is going to happen as opposed to one that isn't... In fact we did most of our work through others. It would very rarely be '[my team] says'. I don't think it's powerful. I think the [team leading on that policy] should say [x needs to happen]. That model was an influence model: if we had to say something we would, but if I could get somebody else to say it I would.</i>	2
	<i>The other part of it is, we're talking with those agencies about this strategic challenge. I've been starting to socialise this idea with the [leaders] of those other organisations... They're up for the conversation, they're going, "Yup. That sounds like a really good idea, we like where you're heading with that." We're trying to grow our constituency, to get to a conversation.</i>	21

First order categories	Second order themes (with representative quotations)	Case source
Refocusing own resources	<i>I'm also re-structuring my policy group, which covers many many things. I'm wanting to really build up the capability and capacity in my [subject] team...</i>	32
	<i>Yes, in terms of how I exercised myself: it was mainly those, also setting up structures. So decisions like, the decision to make it something that was run by staff... was mine; so the architectural design... well, mine and [my boss']; ...So we amended some of that because too much was falling to me and in the scale of it that was difficult. I appointed key individuals...</i>	29
	<i>Interviewer: So how are you doing this? How are you trying to drive the slightly wider view?</i>	28
	<i>Interviewee: I got [created the role of] policy and legislation manager and I make sure she is on top of it; whenever she sees something silly coming through then you know its either through discussion with policy officials, or evidence to assembly committees, or discussion with ministers.</i>	
	<i>So I am not going through revolution at the moment... But we now need to start thinking about how we hit on blind spots? ... So, we have got a [secondee] who is looking at an assurance framework for [a specialist service], with a view to [deploying it] after September 2017. It's one of our blind spots. We also doing thematic reviews... so, that is trying to hit our blind spots. And we've a bid in at the moment for [resources for] what I think is another big blind spot...</i>	28
Entering the civic debate	<i>A big part of my job is to communicate... just softer engagement with staff across that [challenge] constantly. For it to be informing the priority choices we make, about what we will be doing or not doing.</i>	21
	<i>Working with [government] colleagues, working with the, recently, think tanks, academics and so on. You know, the commentariat.</i>	17
	<i>So we'd socialized it, you know, but it wasn't something that was coming from anywhere other than us. So we introduced, we'd introduced the concept, we'd worked with it, and [political parties] had their opportunity to pick it up or not as an issue.</i>	29
	<i>What is interesting is a conversation I was having with [a politician]...</i>	28
	<i>... you know, we're talking to the relevant people there [in the elected body]. But also sort of rather more informal processes. I mean, I'm quite well known down there, having done this for 20 years... bump into people and we have a chat & that sort of thing</i>	38
	<i>I've always maintained my contact with the universities... I talk frequently to [leading academics]... So, I think one of my own contributions in this whole process has been to get into the bloodstream here some of the academic thinking about all of this and also, frankly, help to inform some of that academic thinking.</i>	38
	<i>I give speeches when I can, when I'm invited to, in local government about this, so that I can start giving a different sense within local government about what our department is really thinking.</i>	32
	<i>Interviewee: It is definitely ... and you're right to pick that out, it's definitely easier to work with officials across the system, than it is working across into that political space. Cause it will always be political.</i> <i>Interviewer: And your position is equivocal in that political space?</i> <i>Interviewee: Yeah, it is.</i>	32

Appendix B Interview protocols

In this appendix, I provide copies of the interview protocol used in my pilot study (B.1), and the revised protocol used in the fieldwork in the Welsh and New Zealand Governments (B.2).

Mathias PhD Interview Protocol (pilot study - iteration 1)

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your time today. It is a great privilege to be here, and to have the chance to talk with you. I expect our conversation today will last about 45 to 60 minutes. I have a broad structure for the conversation, but this is a guide only. I'd like to listen to you, so after this introduction I'll try not to say too much!

As I mentioned before, the focus of this study is to understand how senior public servants in Westminster systems make sense of and respond to strategic public challenges. Overall, I'm aiming to interview about 30 senior public servants like you across the Welsh and New Zealand Governments. What I want to do is to take some time to talk through 2 or 3 challenges you have faced recently and explore in detail how these emerged, how you made sense of them, and the course of action that was then taken.

I've already sent you a full participant information sheet. This sets out the ethical guidelines for this study in detail. Most importantly, I want you to be assured that anything you say will be treated confidentially, and that any quotations will be fully anonymised. Second, I am proposing to record this conversation; the recording will again be confidential, anonymised and securely stored. **Are you happy to proceed?** [Start recorder and ask again, for audit trail].

MAIN INTERVIEW

1. About the individual (organisational role, identity)

- Can you tell me about you:
 - A little about your background: how did you arrive to be in this current post?
 - How long have you been doing this particular role?

- Can you explain to me what your role involves?
- To make sure I understand, can you also set out your position within the government?
- How do you describe yourself to people outside the government?

2. About specific challenges

I have sent you a definition of strategic public challenges. I'd like to spend the rest of this interview talking about 1 or 2 strategic public challenges you've faced recently, in depth.

Strategic public challenges are problem situations generated by changes in the external environment that directly and significantly impact (or are expected to impact) a large number of people – and in which government is expected to intervene, and will be held accountable.

They typically bear characteristics of wicked problems: they are complex and interconnected, and there is both incomplete information and divergence in value judgements on what the problem is and on what positive action might constitute.

3. For each challenge:

- To start with, can you give me a quick description of the challenge?
- Can you tell me the story of this challenge from when it first appeared?

DN: aim to cover a to f; the bullet points underneath are prompts to choose from only. LET THE INTERVIEWEE LEAD THE DIRECTION OF THE CONVERSATION.

3a. Noticing

- When did this challenge first emerge?
- Who noticed it first?
- What was it that made you take notice?
- Why was/is this challenge relevant to your role?
- How did it make you feel?

3b. Individual framing: what, how, with whom

- What was your first reaction to this challenge?
- Describe the challenge to me [what]
- What were the first things you did? [process]
- Who else was involved
- Did you write anything, documenting the challenge, at this point? And can I have a copy?

3c. Social framing

- Once you identified the challenge, did you do anything to find out more about it? [What research / examination / exploration process did they go through?]

- What sense of priority was responding to this challenge given? Why?
- Who was important to this? What did they do and what did you do? Why?
 - E.g.,
- Were there different views?
- Any tensions?
- Were the processes of (a) defining / aiming to understand the challenge and (b) deciding the course of action separate and linear, or interwoven?
- Did you write anything, documenting the challenge, at this point? And can I have a copy?
- At what point did you get minister(s) involved? How (e.g., meetings, written briefings, Cabinet paper or presentation)?

3d. Deciding action

- Can you describe / tell me the story of how you responded to this challenge?
- I'm particularly interested in the early phase – you noticed the problem and then...?
- What were you aiming to achieve?
- Why did you follow these steps?
- Was there any course of action you thought about (individually or in discussion with others) but decided against? Why did you decide against it?
- What were the key decisions in this early phase? How were they taken? By whom? What was your role at this point?
 - Were there any documents produced (e.g., briefings, minutes)? By whom?
 - Would you be willing to share those documents, confidentially?
- Were there moments when key ideas or options were ruled in or ruled out, for you?
- Over what timeframe did all this happen?
- What was your role wrt this challenge? What were the other key roles?

3e. Practices selected

- What was the plan of action? IE what was proposed?
 - Again, willing to share docs?
- What was the aim?
- Did the plan contain anything new (a new approach? Involving new people? Changing incentives? Etc)
- Who was given actions? (e.g., gov only, or partners, communities...?)
- Were there any actions that were decided against (e.g., funding / closing a body / setting up a commission)? Why? By whom?

3f. Reflecting back (eliciting conscious post hoc evaluation)

- How well do you think you (*collectively*) responded to the challenge? Why (what's underneath that judgement)?
- How well do you think you (*personally*) responded to the challenge? Why (what's underneath that judgement)?
- **Do you think you took the 'right' course of action?**
- In that example, was there anything you wanted to do, but felt constrained from?
- Is there anything you would have done differently?
- **Is there anything else you think is important about this strategic public challenge that we haven't covered?**

CLOSING

Thank you again for your time – that was really interesting. I'm very grateful for your willingness to participate.

- How was it for you?
- Would it be OK to have a follow-up chat if there is anything to clarify?

<Close>

Mathias PhD Interview Protocol (main study - iterations 2 & 3)

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your time today. It is a great privilege to be here, and to have the chance to talk with you. I expect our conversation today will last about 45 to 60 minutes. I have a broad structure for the conversation, but this is a guide only. I'd like to listen to you, so after this introduction I'll try not to say too much!

As I mentioned before, the focus of this study is to understand how senior public servants in Westminster systems make sense of and respond to strategic public challenges. Overall, I'm aiming to interview about 30 senior public servants like you across the Welsh and New Zealand Governments. What I want to do is to take some time to talk through 2 or 3 challenges you have faced recently and explore in detail how these emerged, how you made sense of them, and the course of action that was then taken.

I've already sent you a full participant information sheet. This sets out the ethical guidelines for this study in detail. Most importantly, I want you to be assured that anything you say will be treated confidentially, and that any quotations will be fully anonymised. Second, I am proposing to record this conversation; the recording will again be confidential, anonymised and securely

stored. **Are you happy to proceed?** [Start recorder and ask again, for audit trail].

MAIN INTERVIEW

1. Interviewee's background

- Can you tell me about yourself and your background?
 - How long have you been in public service?
- And your post here?
 - Can you explain to me what your job involves?
 - To make sure I understand, can you also set out your position within the government?
 - How do you describe yourself to people outside government?

2. About general schema

I'd like to ask a couple of basic questions that should help to orientate us to the topic in hand.

- Can you tell me your view of the role of a senior public servant?
- And what is your view on the role of government?

3. For a specific strategic public challenge...

Strategic public challenges are problem situations generated by changes in the external environment that directly and significantly impact (or are expected to impact) a large number of people – and in which government is expected to intervene, and will be held accountable. They typically bear characteristics of wicked problems: they are complex and interconnected, and there is both incomplete information and divergence in value judgements on what the problem is and on what positive action might constitute.

I have sent you a broad definition of strategic public challenges. I'd like to spend the rest of this interview talking about a strategic public challenge you are facing currently, in depth.

3a. Framing – what?

- Can you describe the challenge to me [what]?
- What are the aspects of the challenge that make it strategic for you?

3b. Noticing – how?

- How did this challenge come about?
- Who noticed it?
- What was it that made you take notice?
- What was your reaction to it? (Aiming to access immediate, non-thought-out response)

3c. Framing – how?

- What are you doing / did you do to understand this challenge, if anything?
- Who was / is important to framing this challenge? Why?

- Were / are there different views? Any tensions?

3d. Responding – what, how, why?

- Can you describe how you are responding to this challenge? (I'm particularly interested in the early phase)
- What is your role wrt this challenge? What are the other key roles?
- What have been the key decisions so far? How were they taken? By whom?
- What have been the key factors in how you have responded so far?
- Is there any course of action you've thought about (individually or in discussion with others) but decided against? Why did you decide against it?
- Is there anything you would still like to do, but feel constrained from?

3e. Reflecting back (eliciting conscious post hoc evaluation)

- What's your evaluation of the strategic response to this challenge so far, overall? Why?
- How well do you think you *personally* responded to the challenge? Why?

CLOSING

Thank you again for your time – that was really interesting. I'm very grateful for your willingness to participate.


- How was it for you?
- Would it be OK to have a follow-up chat if there is anything to clarify?

<Close>

Appendix C Plymouth University Ethics Application and Approval

In this appendix, I provide full copies of the research ethics application made, and approval received.

Ethics application

	<p>Faculty of Business Academic Partnerships</p> <p>Faculty Research Ethics Committee</p> <p>APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL OF RESEARCH</p>	(For FREC use only) Application No:	
		Chair s action (expe dited)	Yes/ No
		Risk level -if high refer to UREC chair imme diatel y Cont. Revie w Date	High/ low / /
		Outc ome (delet e)	Approved/ Declined/ Amend/ Withdrawn
1.	Investigator/ student *Note:1 Megan Mathias	Director of Studies: Professor Duncan Lewis Course/Programme: PhD Business with Management	
	Contact Address:		

	2 Fairleigh Mews, Fairleigh Road, Cardiff CF11 9FR				
	Tel: +971 56 477 2725 / 07961 108323			Email: megan.mathias@plymouth.ac.uk	
2.	Title of Research: Creating public value? Senior public servants' strategy practices in Westminster model systems				
3.	Nature of approval sought (Please tick relevant boxes) *Note:2				
	a) PROJECT:	<input type="checkbox"/>	a) PROGRAMME	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(max 3 years)
	If a) then please indicate which category:				
	Funded/unfunded Research (staff)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Undergraduate	
	MPhil/PhD, ResM, BClin Sci	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Or Other (please state)	
	Masters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
4.	Funding: a) Funding body (if any): none b) If funded, please state any ethical implications of the source of funding, including any reputational risks for the university and how they have been addressed. *Note: 3				
5.	a) Duration of project/programme: *Note: 4 I am a part-time PhD researcher; timeframe overall is this 3-5 years			b) Dates: The data collection stage of the research project is anticipated to run from November 2016 to March 2017.	
6.	Has this project received ethical approval from another Ethics Committee? No a) Please write committee name: b) Are you therefore only applying for Chair's action now?				

7.	<p>Attachments (if required)</p> <p>a) Application/Clearance Form Yes (this one)</p> <p>b) Information sheets for participants Yes</p> <p>c) Consent forms</p> <p>d) Continuing review approval (if requested)</p> <p>e) Other, please state:</p>
<p><i>*1. Principal Investigators are responsible for ensuring that all staff employed on projects (including research assistants, technicians and clerical staff) act in accordance with the University's ethical principles, the design of the research described in this proposal and any conditions attached to its approval.</i></p> <p><i>*2. In most cases, approval should be sought individually for each project. Programme approval is granted for research which comprises an ongoing set of studies or investigations utilising the same methods and methodology and where the precise number and timing of such studies cannot be specified in advance. Such approval is normally appropriate only for ongoing, and typically unfunded, scholarly research activity.</i></p> <p><i>*3. If there is a difference in ethical standards between the University's policy and those of the relevant professional body or research sponsor, Committees shall apply whichever is considered the highest standard of ethical practice.</i></p> <p><i>*4. Approval is granted for the duration of projects or for a maximum of three years in the case of programmes. Further approval is necessary for any extension of programmes.</i></p>	

8.	<p>Aims and Objectives of Research Project/Programme:</p> <p>The aim of this study is to create new knowledge on the practices of public managers as they respond to strategic challenges. It takes public value theory (Moore, 1995) as its starting point, specifically Benington and Moore's (2011) definition of strategic challenges in the public sphere as:</p> <p><i>"... complex, cross-cutting problems... for which there are no simple technical solutions – and indeed where there is no clear or settled agreement about either the causes of the problems or the best ways to address them" (p.13).</i></p> <p>In face of strategic problems like this, what do public managers do? Moore (1995) and Benington and Moore (2011) offer two key concepts: the entrepreneurial public manager, and the strategic triangle. Through inductive investigation, this researcher proposes to examine the practices of senior public managers in response to strategic challenges, and to compare the practices to these two central concepts of Public Value.</p>
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9. **Brief Description of Research Methods and Procedures:**

The Faculty Research Ethics Committee is requested to approve the undertaking of 30 to 40 qualitative, semi-structured interviews with participants, reached through convenience sampling and voluntary choice to take part (see section 10a on informed consent below).

The **target population** is senior public servants in central government who are facing/working on 'strategic public challenges' in New Zealand and Wales, as two sites of Westminster system government. Strategic public challenges are defined as:

"problem situations generated by changes in the external environment that directly and significantly impact (or are expected to impact) a large number of people – and in which government is expected to intervene, and will be held accountable. They typically bear characteristics of wicked problems: they are complex and interconnected, and there is both incomplete information and divergence in value judgements on what the problem is and on what positive action might constitute".

It is expected that the majority of senior public servants face strategic public challenges. Senior public servants are those in the top 3 to 5 grades of the administrative arm of government, who lead divisions/departments and work closely with elected ministers.

Sampling will have to be pragmatic. The target population bears the characteristics of an élite group (Moyser, 2006) – in particular, time-poor with many competing demands for their attention. Accordingly, while a purposive sampling strategy is set out below - and I will pursue balance across the maximum variation factors (gender, age and location) – it will make sense to be opportunistic too, and to take up offers of interview wherever elicited as long as they meet the homogenous sampling factors. The table below sets out the target sample.

<i>Strategic public challenge</i>	New Zealand	Wales
Children in care	2-3	2-3
Housing affordability	2-3	2-3
Family violence	2-3	2-3
International trade	2-3	2-3
Tourism	2-3	2-3
Climate change	2-3	2-3
Variation factors: age and gender	Total: 12-18 Female/male: 6-9 each	Total: 12-18 Female/male: 6-9 each

	<p>Age ranges:</p> <p>30 – 39: 4-6</p> <p>40 – 49: 4-6</p> <p>50+: 4-6</p>	<p>Age ranges:</p> <p>30 – 39: 4-6</p> <p>40 – 49: 4-6</p> <p>50+: 4-6</p>	
	<p>The challenge of accessing these interviewees is not under-estimated. I am in privileged position owing to networks developed during my career and so I am reasonably confident that I can gain access to sufficient numbers of the target population. Specifically, I have been a Senior Civil Servant in the Welsh Government, and an Advisor with New Zealand Trade and Enterprise. I have also worked with Prof Duncan Lewis to bring on board an additional member of my supervisory panel, Prof Evan Berman, who is located at the Victoria School of Government in Wellington, New Zealand; he has kindly offered to assist in arranging interviews in Wellington.</p> <p>For practical reasons I plan to conduct the interviews in two phases – first in New Zealand and then in Wales. As many interviews as possible will be conducted in person; if needed (for example if an interviewee is not available while I am on the ground on either site) further interviews will be undertaken via Skype or phone. All interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed. Audio files will be given a unique identifier (not a name) and will be stored securely on two independent, password-protected data drives. Paper copies will be stored securely in my home office (accessible only to my husband and myself). All copies will be destroyed upon completion of the PhD.</p> <p>Interviews will be semi-structured. My aim is to elicit examples of specific strategic public challenges, and to explore each in detail, from the perspective of the interviewee: I am exploring how s/he frames and understands challenges and how that shapes practice selection. Semi-structured interviews are therefore appropriate to enable interviewees to direct the flow of the conversation – that will be important data in itself. An outline is provided below.</p> <p>MAIN INTERVIEW OUTLINE</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me about you <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you describe your role at work for me? • What does it involve? • Who do you work with (other roles, rather than individuals)? • Do you have any other roles, outside this organization? 2. Tell me about this organization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you give me an overview of the Department/Ministry? 3. I'm going to provide you with a definition of a type of challenge... 		

- *Can you tell me if you've faced challenges like this in the past few years?*
 - *Next, I'd like you to talk me through each of those challenges*
 - i. *Probe: noticing and framing:*
 1. *Can you explain the challenge to me?*
 2. *How did it come about?*
 3. *When?*
 4. *What made it a challenge for you?*
 - ii. *Probe: practices:*
 1. *What happened in response to the challenge?*
 2. *Who did what? Why?*
 3. *What did you (personally) do?*
 4. *So what was your role with regard to this challenge?*
 5. *What timeframe did this happen over?*
4. *Looking back at the challenge(s) you've kindly talked through:*
- *How successful have the efforts to tackle the challenge been, on a scale of 1 to 7 (where 1 is low, and 7 is high)?*
 - *What has been key to success or failure?*
 - *Which of the practices / actions do you regard as most important to that outcome? Individually or collectively?*

10.	<p>Ethical Protocol</p> <p>Please indicate how you will ensure this research conforms with each clause of the University of Plymouth's <i>Principles for Research Involving Human Participants</i>. Please attach a statement which addresses each of the ethical principles set out below.</p>
	<p>(a) Informed Consent:</p> <p>Each consenting interview participant will be provided with an information sheet outlining the below information on aims, objectives, process, personal impact, confidentiality and the right to withdraw. Wording is provided in section 10c) below.</p> <p>Given the elite status of the target population, a presumption of competence is reasonable. The research is also not anticipated to be sensitive, beyond a requirement for absolute confidentiality. I therefore propose to adopt a tacit consent approach as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interview request letters will be sent by email. These will summarise the purpose of the interview and the ethical standards being observed; 2. Once a potential participant has responded, confirming willingness to be interviewed (& probably arranging a date and time) s/he will be sent the formal information sheet. This will set out information about the project in full (again, see 10C); 3. I will take hard copies of the information sheet to all interviews. At the start of each interview, I will check that the participant has read the sheet and is comfortable to proceed. <p>Overall, this approach prompts each participant three times to consider their participation before the interview begins. S/he will of course also be able to withdraw consent at any time afterwards too.</p>
	<p>(b) Openness and Honesty:</p> <p>This study will not use deception, covert questioning, environment manipulation or any other technique in contravention to the principles of open and honest interviewing. Indeed, like Whittington (2011), this study will value the understandings of the research subjects themselves – and complete openness about the purpose and ‘angle’ of the study will be shared accordingly.</p>
	<p>(c) Right to Withdraw:</p>

	<p>The information sheet contains the following wording:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether you decide to take part or not is a completely free choice. • Even if you agree to participate, you can change your mind before or during the interview and you do not have to give a reason. Your data will be destroyed should you withdraw, in accordance with best practice
	<p>(d) Protection From Harm:</p> <p>I am aware that in carrying out this research I am acting as a representative of Plymouth University and will take all reasonable precautions to safeguard participants, and fulfil my duty of care. The participant information sheet contains the following wording:</p> <p><i>Are there any risks?</i></p> <p><i>I am keen for you to be comfortable to share your experiences openly. I will not attribute any quotations from the research to you. The information gathered will be used for this project, under the auspices of Plymouth University, only. The interview will be recorded on a digital voice recorder but I commit to absolute confidentiality, including storing the recordings securely (in compliance with Plymouth University's Ethics Policy and Data Protection 1998 legislation). Further, all audio records will be destroyed once the study is completed. A paper record [transcript] of the interview will be kept but any information which would identify you will be excluded from this transcript. Interviewees will simply be referred to as person A, person B etc.</i></p> <p>While this study is exploring individual responses to strategic public challenges, it is not anticipated to touch upon personally sensitive matters. The most likely risk is that interviewees may share sensitive political or policy information with me, which should be kept fully confidential. As a former Senior Civil Servant myself, as a professional researcher, and as a consultant, I am fully aware of the need to respect such confidences and will so do.</p> <p>Lastly, I am aware of my responsibility to protect myself from harm. My interviewees are not likely to pose a threat. However as standard practice for field work, I will provide my Director of Studies* a schedule of my interviews for each day, including start times, anticipated end times and location. I will update him daily as a simple security measure.</p>

	<p>* This will be for interviews in Wales. In Wellington, I will do the same with Evan Berman, as the supervisory panel member in the same city.</p>			
	<p>(e) Debriefing:</p> <p>Each participant will be provided with a detailed information sheet before each interview, outlining what the process involves, confidentiality and right to withdraw – as per the steps set out above</p>			
	<p>(f) Confidentiality:</p> <p>The information sheet contains the following statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The interview is absolutely confidential and the recording will anonymized and only accessible to Megan Mathias as the researcher. • I may use direct quotations from our conversation in my thesis and / or a resulting academic article, but any quotation will be fully anonymized: they will not be linked or linkable to your name in any way. • The interview will be recorded on a digital voice recorder but I commit to absolute confidentiality, including storing the recordings securely (in compliance with Plymouth University's Ethics Policy and Data Protection 1998 legislation). Further, all audio records will be destroyed once the study is completed. A paper record [transcript] of the interview will be kept but any information which would identify you will be excluded from this transcript. Interviewees will simply be referred to as person A, person B etc. 			
	<p>(g) Professional Bodies Whose Ethical Policies Apply to this Research:</p> <p>This research will be undertaken in accordance with the non-harm and integrity principles of the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics (FRE) 2010 Updated September 2012.</p>			
11.	<p>Declaration*:</p> <p>To the best of our knowledge and belief, this research conforms to the ethical principles laid down by Plymouth University and by the professional body specified in 6 (g).</p>			
		Name	E-mail (s)	Date

	Principal Investigator:	Megan Mathias	megan.mathias@plymouth.ac.uk	31/7/16
	Other Staff Investigators:	N/A		
	Director of Studies (only where Principal Investigator is a postgraduate student):	Professor Duncan Lewis	Duncan.lewis@plymouth.ac.uk	

***You will be notified by the Research Ethical Approval Committee once your application is approved.**

This process normally takes around 3-4 weeks.

Do You Plan To Do:

- Research involving vulnerable groups – for example, children and young people, those with a learning disability or cognitive impairment, or individuals in a dependent or unequal relationship

Answer: **No**

- Research involving sensitive topics – for example participants' sexual behaviour, their illegal or political behaviour, their experience of violence, their abuse or exploitation, their mental health, or their gender or ethnic status

Answer: **No**

- Research involving groups where permission of a gatekeeper is normally required for initial access to members – for example, ethnic or cultural groups, native peoples or indigenous communities

Answer: **No. I will liaise with a senior contact within the public service of New Zealand and the Welsh civil service beforehand to seek their imprimatur for the study; I hope this will encourage participation, but it is not required.**

- Research involving deception or which is conducted without participants' full and informed consent at the time the study is carried out

Answer: **No**

- Research involving access to records of personal or confidential information, including genetic or other biological information, concerning identifiable individuals

Answer: No

- Research which would induce psychological stress, anxiety or humiliation or cause more than minimal pain

Answer: No

- Research involving intrusive interventions – for example, the administration of drugs or other substances, vigorous physical exercise, or techniques such as hypnotherapy. Participants would not encounter such interventions, which may cause them to reveal information which causes concern, in the course of their everyday life.

Answer: No

Completed Forms should be forwarded BY E-MAIL to Cher Cressey, Secretary of the FREC at: ccressey@plymouth.ac.uk

Please forward any questions/comments or complaints to:

Cher Cressey, DTC Administrator

Graduate School (Link Building), Plymouth University, Drake Circus, Plymouth, PL4 8AA

Tel: 01752 585540

Updated: 03/07/14

Ethics approval



Ref: FoB/UPC/FREC/FREC1516.68

Date: 23 September 2016

Dear Megan

Ethical Approval Application No: FREC1516.68

Title: Creating public value? Senior public servants' strategy practices in Westminster model systems

Thank you for your application to the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) seeking ethical approval for your proposed research. The members of the Committee have carefully considered your application and would like to congratulate you for a very well thought through and clearly articulated submission. It had very clear and concise statement of the research aims and careful discussion of the approach to data collection

and management. Regarding the latter, there was a critical and succinct description of the target population, sample size and sampling techniques applied, with the nature of the semi-structured interview also very well presented. Key research related ethics and how these would be managed were also generally very well discussed.

We are therefore happy to grant approval to your application.

However, we have the following comments and suggestions for the research moving forward and for future applications to the FREC:

i) Section 3: Nature of approval sought (Please tick relevant boxes)

Given that the proposed work is a research (PhD) project the appropriate box to tick is 'PROJECT'.

ii) Section 6:

A response to section 6 (b) is required.

iii) Section 8: Aims and objectives of the research project/programme

An outline of some specific research objectives would have been useful to underpin the data collection approach as described in section 9. For example, which specific research objectives do the questions in the interview schedule help to address?

iv) Section 9: Brief description of research methods and procedures

More could have been said about why New Zealand and Wales were chosen as comparators other than the fact that the researcher has worked there. There needs to be some academic basis for this especially as the Welsh Assembly is not the same as the New Zealand parliament in terms of its powers and legal authority but we presume this will be something that will be properly addressed within the methodology

v) Section 10: Ethical Protocol

A statement in section 9 that, '*All copies [of the data] will be destroyed upon completion of the PhD*' is good but it is open to interpretation as to how long the data will be kept for.

Regarding this, article 88 of the University's Research Ethics Policy states the following, '*The University expects that primary research data is held securely for a **period of ten years** after the completion of a research project, or for such longer period as may be required by a research funder . . .*' (Please see: <http://www1.plymouth.ac.uk/research/support/ethics/Pages/default.aspx>). We would therefore strongly recommend that the paper record (transcripts) is kept securely up to this minimum period of ten years.

Approval is for the duration of the project. However, please resubmit your application to the committee if the information provided in the form alters or is likely to alter significantly.

We would like to wish you good luck with your research project.

Yours sincerely

(Sent as email attachment)

Dr James Benhin

Chair

Faculty Research Ethics Committee

Faculty of Business

Appendix D Participant Information Sheet

A copy of the participant information sheet (PIS) below was provided to informants via email when arrangements were made for interviews, on reconfirmation of interview arrangements as the date neared, and offered again in hard copy at the start of each interview.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET:

Research into 'Responding to strategic public challenges'

You are being invited to take part in an academic research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Contact Details:

Researcher: **Megan Mathias**, Doctoral Researcher at Plymouth University, UK, and Research Fellow, Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government, United Arab Emirates. Telephone: +971 56 477 2725; email: megan.mathias@plymouth.ac.uk or megan.mathias@gmail.com.

Director of Studies (supervisor): Professor Duncan Lewis, Plymouth University, UK. Email: Duncan.Lewis@plymouth.ac.uk

What is this study about?

Senior public servants work on many complex challenges all the time. There is however relatively little empirical research on exactly how they do so. This study is therefore exploring how individual senior public servants in Westminster systems make sense of strategic public challenges, and what they do in response to them. Strategic public challenges are defined as:

Conceptualisation:

Strategic public challenges are problem situations generated by changes in the external environment that directly and significantly impact (or are expected to impact) a large number of people – and in which government is expected to intervene, and will be held accountable.

They typically bear characteristics of wicked problems: they are complex and interconnected, and there is both incomplete information and divergence in value judgements on what the problem is and on what positive action might constitute.

Why am I being asked to participate in this study?

The aim is to interview a cross-section of senior public servants across two Westminster systems – New Zealand and Wales – and across a limited but diverse selection of strategic public challenges. You are being asked to help with this study because you are a senior public servant who has worked on such challenges.

What am I being asked to do?

If you agree to help with this study, you will be contacted to arrange an interview, in person or via Skype/phone. The interview will last 45-60 minutes and will be audio recorded. The interview is absolutely confidential and the recording will be anonymized and only accessible to me, Megan Mathias, as the researcher.

During the interview, I will ask you about your experiences noticing, framing and responding to strategic public challenges at work. I may use direct quotations from our conversation in my thesis and / or a resulting academic article, but any quotations will be fully anonymized: they will not be linked or linkable to your name or role in any way.

Will I benefit from taking part?

The aim of the project is to improve our collective understanding of how senior public servants in Westminster system governments respond to strategic public challenges. Ultimately, this information will be shared publicly via academic publication. By participating, you will be helping to generate new knowledge, but there may not be any direct benefit to you personally.

Are there any risks?

I am keen for you to be comfortable to share your experiences openly. I will not attribute any quotations from the interview to you. The information gathered will be used for this project, under the auspices of Plymouth University, only. The interview will be recorded on a digital voice recorder and I commit to absolute confidentiality, including storing the recordings securely (in compliance with

Plymouth University's Ethics Policy and Data Protection 1998 legislation). Further, all audio records will be destroyed once the study is completed. A written record [transcript] of the interview will be kept securely and encrypted on a standalone computer, and any information that might identify you will be excluded from this transcript. Interviewees will simply be referred to as person A, person B etc.

Your rights:

- Whether you decide to take part or not is a completely free choice.
- Even if you agree to participate, you can change your mind before or during the interview and you do not have to give a reason.
- All your information will be treated as confidential and stored securely. In any publication, your name will not be connected with anything you tell me.
- At any time you have the right to contact my Director of Studies to check on this research project or make a complaint.

Thank you very much for your time and help. Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time if you have any questions about this project (megan.mathias@plymouth.ac.uk).

12th September 2016
